



Cold air heavily filled the dimly lit rooms with various machines. The machinery seemed to have been made with advanced technology that was impossible for the Shepherd Republic to have at the time.

In a room with the atmosphere of a research facility, there were two people.

One was a young Caninu woman, with long, straight blonde hair, and impressive eyes. The other was a man with a considerably large figure.

However, the man seemed to be different from the two races living in the world, the “Caninu” and the “Felineko”. There was no fur that should have been covering his whole body, with only hair that grew mainly on the top of his head and chin.

Besides some individual differences between the Caninu and Felineko races, their noses and mouths were largely protruded, however the man’s nose was oddly low, and his mouth was flat as well.

In a world different from the current one, the appearance of the man would have been immediately understood.

It was “Human”.

The “Human” man and the young Caninu woman silently checked a list on a stack of papers, but eventually the woman opened her mouth and lightly sighed.

“Again, other than the Seven Children, there seems to be no synchronization reactions at all.”

She laid the paper stack on a desk and waited for the man's response.

"If that's correct, then the answer is clear,"

The man responded calmly, without delay.

"All experimental bodies other than the Seven Children are to be discarded."

The man's words were to be somewhat predicted, but the woman attempted to dissuade him nonetheless.

"Wait Baion, destroying everything is..."

Though the man called Baion was imposing, he replied with a voice that seemed empty.

"Again, the experimental bodies other than the Seven Children are all to be discarded, Merveille."

With his frozen heart, Merveille realized that further attempts at persuasion would be pointless.

"...I will proceed with the nano-analysis process by stopping supply of the life-support agent."

White, bright lights illuminated a separate room of the same research facility, with only a few toys like building blocks in it. There was no sense of life inside.

It could hardly be called a room for children.

Of the young people left there, a dozen children with physiques large enough to identify them as young adults were sitting in tandem without interfering with each other.

This was how the room typically looked.

On the necks of the children, metal tags with numbers written on them were worn like pendants.

The door slowly opened, and Merveille entered the "room". She slowly looked at each child in the room, closed her eyes, and breathed, deeply and quietly.

"Well, it's time to say good night."

Upon hearing her voice, the children stood up, and filed over to the door.

All except for one Caninu youth.

While sitting in the back of the room, the young man was carefully caressing the tag that was put on him.

Because he was always caressing it, the tag marked “9071” was worn out in a few areas. He seemed to be 17 years old, one of the oldest among the children in the room.

Merveille called out to the young man,

“Did you not hear me? ...Enter the resting bed.”

While sitting down, he glanced at Merveille, and said,

“Are we going to come back in the morning?”

“I’m sure you will, in Category 9...”

“What’s that?”

Merveille could not answer the youth’s question.

“There’s no need to say anymore.”

The young man stood up and approached Merveille.

She looked at the neck of the young man standing next to her.

“9071... Contact type sensory-tuning abilities.”

“What am I going to be used for? Where am I...”

The young man stretched his right hand over to Merveille, and she accepted the hand on her shoulder.

“Guh...”

Feeling intense pain in his head, the young man held it with his left hand.

Merveille’s emotions ran through his right hand.

Awe, anxiety, regret, pity—

“All right... I’ll achieve morning on my own.”

The young man took his right hand off of Merveille’s shoulder and ran out from the room.

Merveille watched the youth disappear from the hallway.

“Make it as far as you can, but—”

She murmured, closing her eyes.

“I don’t know how many more mornings will come to you.”

The next day, Baion found out that several experimental bodies had disappeared from the resting bed, however he had no interest in what had happened to the failures.

“Those experimental bodies won’t live for long without permanent treatment... I can’t worry about them; my top priority is to advance preparations for synchronized startup with the Titano-Machina.”

“Yes, that’s right...”

Merveille had no choice but to focus her mind elsewhere.

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The young man woke up to the sharp sound and vibration of an engine. His chest tag shook with clinking noise. There were various containers in the vicinity, both large and small. The large vibrations, engine sounds, rumbling, and wind told him that this was the cargo hold of a transport ship.

“Is this... a window?”

Restlessly looking around the cargo room, he found a small metallic shutter. With hesitation, he opened it.

“Nh—!”

A blinding light jumped into the young man's eyes from the gap in the shutter. As soon as his eyes grew used to the sea of clouds reflecting the sun's light into the gap, the blue sky came into sight.

"Ha... Hahaha! I achieved morning!"

The young man clasped his hands. He badly wanted to cry out loud, but remembering that he was stowing away, he held back.

It was right then.

The young man was struck with a severe pain similar to being beaten on the head.

"Ah—! ...AAH AAAAAA!!!"

Blurred in front of him, his chest strongly tightened.

"Wha— What is this!?"

He was assaulted by the sensation of a rag wringing his whole body and collapsed onto the floor. Unable to bear it, he threw up instantly.

He choked on his vomit while writhing on the floor in agony.

"guh... some...one... unnh..."

In his fading consciousness, he could hear the voices of the crew who heard all the noise come running. Just before his consciousness ceased, a small amount of the blue sky came through the shutter and into the eyes of the young man.

When he came to, the young man was behind the streets of an unknown city. His whole body was bruised, scratched, soaking wet, and covered with mud. The truth was, after the transport ship arrived at the harbor, he had woken up for a bit, but as a result of the severe pain in his body running rampant, he lost consciousness again in this area.

The seizure pains assaulting his body had currently faded, somehow.

However, the young man was desperate.

"I... won't live long. That much I know."

He was frustrated.

"Did I achieve morning? Why... Why was I born!?"

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It was evening, above a certain hill.

Without emotion, a Felineko child wearing a tattered cloak was looking down at the city from a hill. Holding an object under her clothes, she kept her right hand near her chest.

"Today remains unchanged. Both the city and myself."

With her right hand, she clenched the object under her clothes.

"But even so, I must live on."

Suddenly, she felt an invisible wind pierce through the world, causing it to tremble.

However, the branches on the trees did not shake.

"What in the world..."

Her right hand was vibrating. To be exact, the "object" that was clenched in her right hand was vibrating.

"This is... it can't be!?"

From underneath her clothes, she hurriedly took out the "object" that continued vibrating. Being somewhat too big to call a pendant, it was more like a large medallion. A round stone in the middle of the medallion flickered red, as if warning of something.

Eventually the medallion stopped vibrating, but the hand holding it was still trembling. Not just her hand, but her small shoulders, knees, and whole body. She held her shoulders still to calm herself down and opened her mouth.

“At last, it seems the time has come for me to fulfill my mission... Beluga.”

Her somewhat strained face seemed to be crying with laughter.

“But everyone in Ragdoll is already... How can I find a sacrifice?”

As night closed in her lost eyes continued to look down at the city.

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The young man with the tag “9071” on his neck was aimlessly wandering around the city with confusion. Occasionally pain would numb his body, however he gradually became accustomed to it.

The day was already in progress.

The current light was not the same as what the young man had previously seen it as, and now the morning sun seemed disgusting to him.

The town wasn't big, but there were many people coming and going near the market area, with plenty of cargo trucks driving by. From in front of the youth, a young Caninu girl ran while glancing about. As she ran obliviously, the young man tried to avoid bumping into her, however a sudden seizure occurred and his body ran into intense pain.

As he had already begun to move his body to avoid the girl, he was likely going to collapse forward.

“Kh...”

His arms were unsupported and protruded in such a way that, when the girl bumped into them, she was thrust forward by his arms.

“Ah—”

The pushed girl fell down into a car lane, and a truck heading for the market started to close in on her.

“(Ah! She's in danger!)”

The young man tried to extend his hand to pull the girl, but pain hit his whole body once again, and his arms were unable to rise. The sound of people's screams and the truck's brakes occurred at the same time.

The truck briskly stopped in front of the girl. She had a delayed reaction before beginning to cry as the crowd breathed a collective sigh of relief. The young man fell to his knees from the pain in his back.

“Hey, asshole! The hell’s wrong with you!?”

A robust man, who was standing near the youth, suddenly grasped him by the collar as he began to yell at him.

“Wha...”

“Don’t act surprised! I saw this bastard shove that girl!”

People began accusing him.

(You’re wrong... I-I...)

He desperately tried to clear up the misunderstanding.

However, the feeling of the man’s anger suddenly flew into the young man’s heart.

“Kh...!”

As the man touched him, his sense-tuning ability turned spontaneously went off.

With his thoughts in too much disarray to talk about the pain in his body, his face could do nothing but convulse.

Feeling disturbed, the man thrust the youth away.

“Tch, get lost!”

The other onlookers also left, leaving words to condemn the young man.

The young man kneeled on the same spot for a while, but when the pain in his body subsided, he rose and unsteadily walked toward the back of a less populated alley.

“Where I belong... isn’t here.”

Suddenly, tears began to fall to the ground.

“Was there any meaning in escaping from that place... No...It doesn’t matter... I don’t need anything like morning.”

The youth crouched down by a dead-end in the back-alley.

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The child who had previously been on the hill was walking around the city, wearing a tattered cloak that covered her entire head.

To keep it from being visible, she clasped the medallion in her right hand.

“This reaction... Once again, to find someone to seal Lemures... How can I...!”

She looked at the jewel in the middle of the medallion with an impatient expression.

**\*ping\***

Only once before had there been a different reaction from the medallion.

“N-Now?”

**\*ping\***

“This is echoing? I can’t believe this, it found a sacrifice!?”

She began looking around in a hurry, however there were many crowds of people.

“Out of all of these people... Who could you be?”

As she quickly stepped forward, the medallion’s echo gradually became stronger, as did the beat of her heart.

“Where? Where are you!?”

Relying on the medallion’s echo, she walked through the city.

**\*piing\***

“They’re close... They’re definitely in the vicinity!”

Her feet came to a stop.

There were no signs of life, however the medallion’s reaction was powerful.

Then, she noticed someone raise their head in the back of an alley.

“I... found them.”

Feelings she hadn’t properly understood, like tearfulness and happiness, were born.



“Are you okay?”

When the young man opened his eyes, a child wearing a tattered cloak was looking into them.

“If you’re looking for me, then please, just go away....”

He closed his eyes again.

“I can’t just leave someone collapsed in a place like this,”

He had thought that the child looked awfully mature, but decided to ignore it to avoid trouble.

However, she did not give up, and spoke to the young man,

“Come on, you’ll catch a cold,”

The child shook the young man’s body. When she did, the young man came in contact with her emotions.

Lost, frightened, betrayed—

The young man flinched and gazed up.

“Y-You’re... lying.”

The young man thought she was just a thief pretending to be kind and was fine with that, as he had nothing that could be stolen anyway, and in his mind, he smiled bitterly.

However, the child couldn't easily reply. He slightly opened his eyes to see her trembling.

"...You are a thief, aren't you?"

He declared the child to be a thief.

"I don't have anything, please... find someone else."

He closed his eyes again and began to slumber.

At evening, a cold wind brushed against the youth's nose. When he suddenly awakened, there were signs of someone nearby. The child thief sat before the young man, observing him.

"You...still..."

She asked with a serious tone,

"Why do you call me a liar and a thief?"

It would be too troublesome to explain his ability, so he gave an appropriate reply.

"Come on... I'm not wrong, am I?"

The child thought for a little bit, and then opened her mouth.

"No, it... may be just as you said."

Those words had a certain impact to them, making him doubt that she was really a thief.

Whilst thinking, the young man said,

"If that's the case, I told you earlier... I don't have anyth—"

"No! No... What I want is something that only you have."

The child interrupted the youth's words.

"Something... only I have...?"

"(Does she mean my ability?)", the young man thought.

The child grabbed a hold of the young man's hand.

"Kh...?"

He felt the child's emotions again.

A strong determination, a sense of a mission.

"Please give me... your life."

There was no sense of uncertainty in her words.

"My... life?"

The young man smiled bitterly.

"You're no thief... You're a Reaper."

The child looked down for a moment, then replied,

"You're welcome to believe that."

The young man was a little amused.

"(I was planning on dying here naturally... It doesn't bother me if I die this way)"

Looking serious, the child waited for a reply.

"Does this Reaper have a name?"

"...Elh, I'm Elh Melizée"

"Elh the Reaper... I see."

The young man dryly smiled.

"I don't really understand, but... use my life however you want."

Elh smiled with relief, however, it seemed a little stiff for some reason.

Her smile made a lasting impression on the young man.

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Elh and the youth were in the abandoned house that she normally used as a hideout. She directed the medallion to the youth and began casting her magic.

"Now, we are ready to begin."

Elh handed the medallion over to the young man.

"I will transfer the medallion to you. Please, hold it closely."

"? ...Ah."

The young man received the medallion and put it around his neck. A clinking sound was heard from his metal tag hitting the medallion.

Elh curiously asked him about it.

“What is that pendant?”

The young man answered with a bitter face,

“This my only possession, it’s for good luck”

“I apologize... I didn’t mean to bring that up.”

Feeling a little awkward, Elh changed the subject.

“Oh... That reminds me, I haven’t gotten your name yet.”

“I don’t have one.”

“Huh?”

Elh stared at him in confusion, not having expected that kind of reply.

The young man looked at the tag on his neck. The number “9071” was written on it. He did not want to admit that it was what represented him.

“So, just call me whatever you want.”

“...I’m sorry.”

Seeing the child’s guilt, the young man opened his mouth.

“Enough of that, tell me about you.”

“If I told you, would you even believe me?”

“You’re a Reaper, I believe that much.”

“Then... shall I tell you a story?”

Elh spoke of the “Rite of Forfeit”, a ritual where she would seal an ancient destructive weapon called “Lemures”, and of how she is the last survivor of the Paladin clan and inherited the medallion in order to perform the rituals, which also granted her the ability to live for 300 years.

And, of how the medallion chose the young man to be sacrificed, the life required for the Rite of Forfeit.

“In other words, you’re... No, you look like a child, but you’re actually 300 years old?”

Elh answered with a strained smile.

“Yes. You don’t have to believe me.”

The young man looked at Elh’s conflicted face.

“...Living for 300 years... What does that feel like?”

The young man continued carelessly,

“Whatever happens with this ‘sacrifice’ thing, I won’t have had a very long life.”

“Well...”

Elh was unable to connect her words.

A heavy silence came.

“My bad. I’ll stop talking now.”

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A week or so had passed since then. The strange pains the youth had been suffering from had hardly occurred. Rather, his body felt even lighter. It seemed like a lie that he was currently so close to death.

(My body... What’s going on?)

Elh spoke to the young man while he was deep in thought,

“What’s wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing... It’s just, I thought my body’s been feeling better recently.”

Upon hearing those words, Elh took on a serious expression.

“That’s probably due to the medallion.”

“The medallion?”

“The medallion is protecting you so that you can fulfill your role as ‘sacrifice’.”

Hearing about the medallion, the youth was amazed.

(This is... protecting me?)

(With this, I... don’t have to die?)

The youth’s heart wavered greatly.

As he caressed the medallion while deep in thought, Elh stared at him in suspicion.

The next morning, the young man woke up to Elh’s hushed voice.

“Please wake up... the door to the Sacred Realm is ready.”

“I see... Good morning.”

From a gap in the wall, bright sunlight shined through, illuminating the interior of the abandoned house.

“...I’m sorry.”

“You’re a Reaper, don’t apologize.”

A tension had drifted into the abandoned house as the young man vaguely smiled and got himself up, saying,

“Shall we go, Elh?”

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Elh told the young man that he would not be able to see or enter the ‘Sacred Realm’, the place where the ritual would be held, by ordinary means. In order to perform the ‘Rite of Forfeit’, when the sacrifice was ready, a pillar of light would appear to those who were ‘Paladins’.

Elh and the youth had successfully located a transport ship heading to the island where the pillar of light would appear and snuck into its cargo hold.

The atmosphere inside the cargo hold was somewhat relieving when the ship left harbor, but it soon became heavy. Elh's face was stiff, obviously feeling a deep tension.

Despite knowing that it was her mission to take the life of the man in front of her, she couldn't help but be anxious.

The young man opened his mouth and began speaking to himself,

"Well, last time—"

"Huh?"

"This isn't the first time I've snuck onto a cargo hold."

"..."

Elh's silence prompted him to continue speaking.

"Back then, I was greeted by the morning sky that I'll probably never see again and thought, 'I attained freedom!'"

Amused, the young man continued to speak.

"But soon afterwards, I discovered that, from birth, freedom would never have been possible for me. I discovered that there was no meaning in understanding the feelings of the people I touched. More than that, I wanted to know the reason why I was born... That's what I thought, anyway..."

He looked straight at Elh.

"Until I met you."

"What... do you mean?"

"You gave my life meaning."

"Please, stop. I know what I'm doing isn't nice. ...But if I don't do it, the world will be destroyed!"

With her face becoming stiff, Elh stood up and sat away from the young man.

Once again, the room was filled with a heavy atmosphere.

Until the transport ship arrived at their destination, not a single word escaped from their mouths.

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"Please, follow me."

Elh, calmly and persistently, guided the distracted youth.

"Sure."

The young man responded with little to say.

From the harbor where the transport ship had arrived, they passed through the city and into a forest.

“That’s the door to the ‘Sacred Realm’.”

Though the youth could not see the pillar of light that Elh was pointing to, he noticed an area where the surrounding air appeared to be distorted.

“Please don’t stray from me.”

Elh held out her hand.

The young man hesitated and grabbed it.

“Kh...”

The young man waited for her feelings to flow in—

“We’re here... The Sacred Realm.”

Elh lifted her hands.

When the young man came to, and before he even realized it, all the surrounding trees had disappeared, and he was standing in a dim, yet faintly shining location reminiscent of ruins.

“Please hold the medallion towards me... The Rite of Forfeit will begin.”

“Ah... No, wait! I still have this—”

“...No, you’re not going to die yet.”

“I-I see.”

The young man did as he was told and held the medallion towards Elh.

Elh turned to the youth, and widely raised her arms in both directions.

A crest of shining magic rose to Elh’s forehead.

“Oohn-Sala-Loosa...”

“Marya-Sala-Loosa...”

“Mani-Shirahalita”

“Yaan-Loosa...”

As the medallion’s jewel shone dazzlingly, light wrapped around the young man’s body. Though he was afflicted with mild exhaustion, he quickly got past it.

“...This ends the ‘Rite of Forfeit’. Let us leave.”

They returned to the forest once more.

“Please, let me have the medallion.”

“Sure.”

The young man handed the medallion to Elh.

Elh reviewed the medallion to be sure that all the arrangements were set.

“The preparations for both you and the medallion are ready.”

“I see...”

“After I cast the ‘Words of Rest’, through the medallion, your life will be taken and Lemures will be resealed—”

The young man looked at Elh silently.

“...Do you have nothing to say? If not, then I will now take your life.”

“No... You should just say those ‘Words of Rest’. What wrong, Reaper?”

The youth kept staring straight at Elh.

“I will say them... That’s why I’ve... That’s why I’ve kept on living!

Elh looked away.

“...Kehe.”

Suddenly, the youth began to laugh chillingly.

Elh shouted in dismay,

“W-What are you laughing at!?”

“How dumb can you be?”

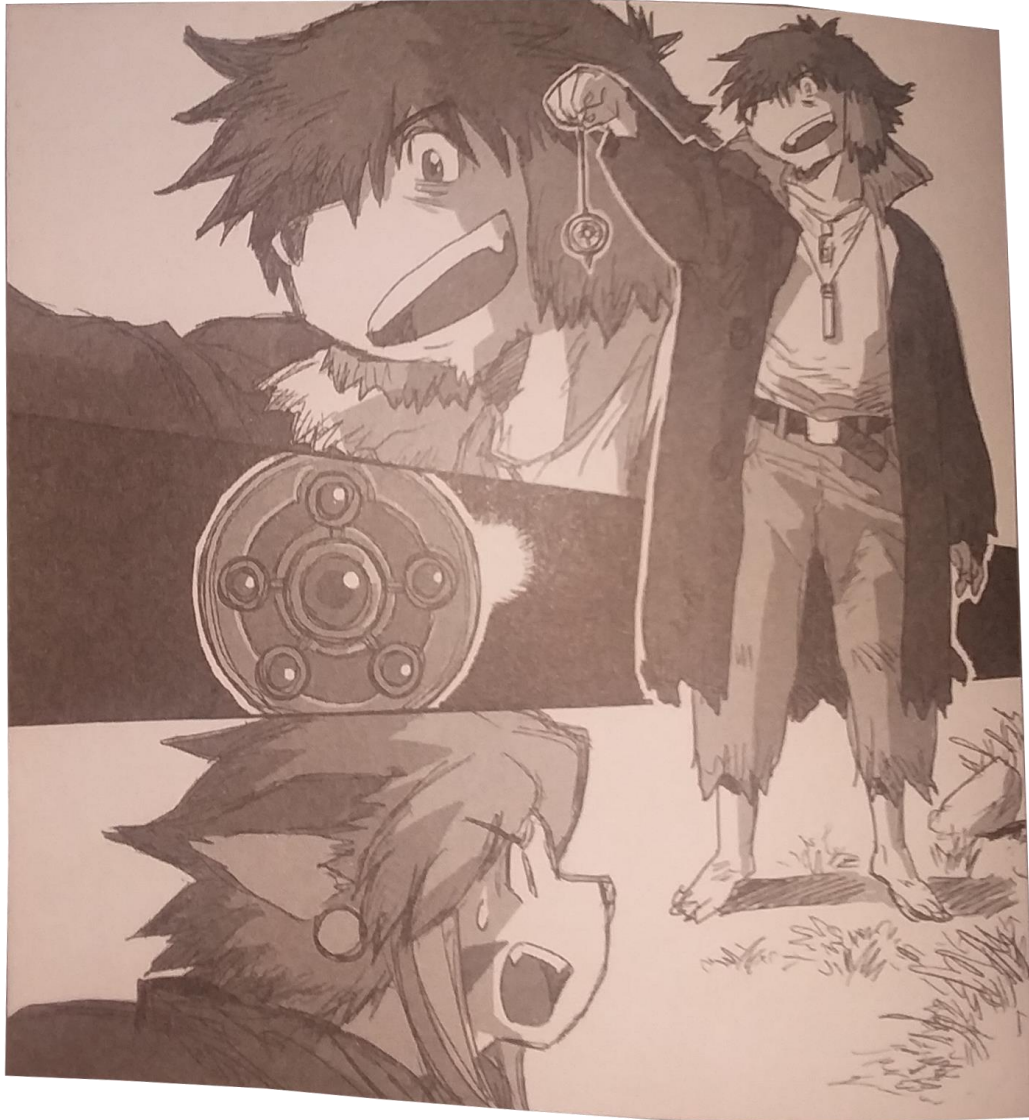
Elh flinched in shock.

The youth approached and snatched the medallion from her.

“W-What are you doing!?”

“You gave my life meaning— With this medallion!”

With the medallion glimmering, the young man grinned and laughed as he spoke.



“As long as I have this, it looks like I won’t die! Hahaha!!”

The color of shock suddenly disappeared from Elh, and the atmosphere clinging to her seemed frozen.

“To protect the world! That is the reason I’m alive!!”

Taking a large breath, Elh screamed as if continuously wringing out her voice.

The youth’s manipulative movements came to a stop.

“The medallion is linked”

“To the sacrifice’s life”

“Lemures will—”

“Slumber!”

In that instant, the young man smiled.

Elh did not fail to notice it.

Simultaneously, the jewel in the medallion shone intensely.

Elh was unable to keep her eyes open.

From the center of the area where the youth was holding the medallion, an invisible wave spread out over Shepherd.

“N-nh! ...UAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

In the pure whiteness of her vision, only the youth’s screams could pierce through Elh’s ears.

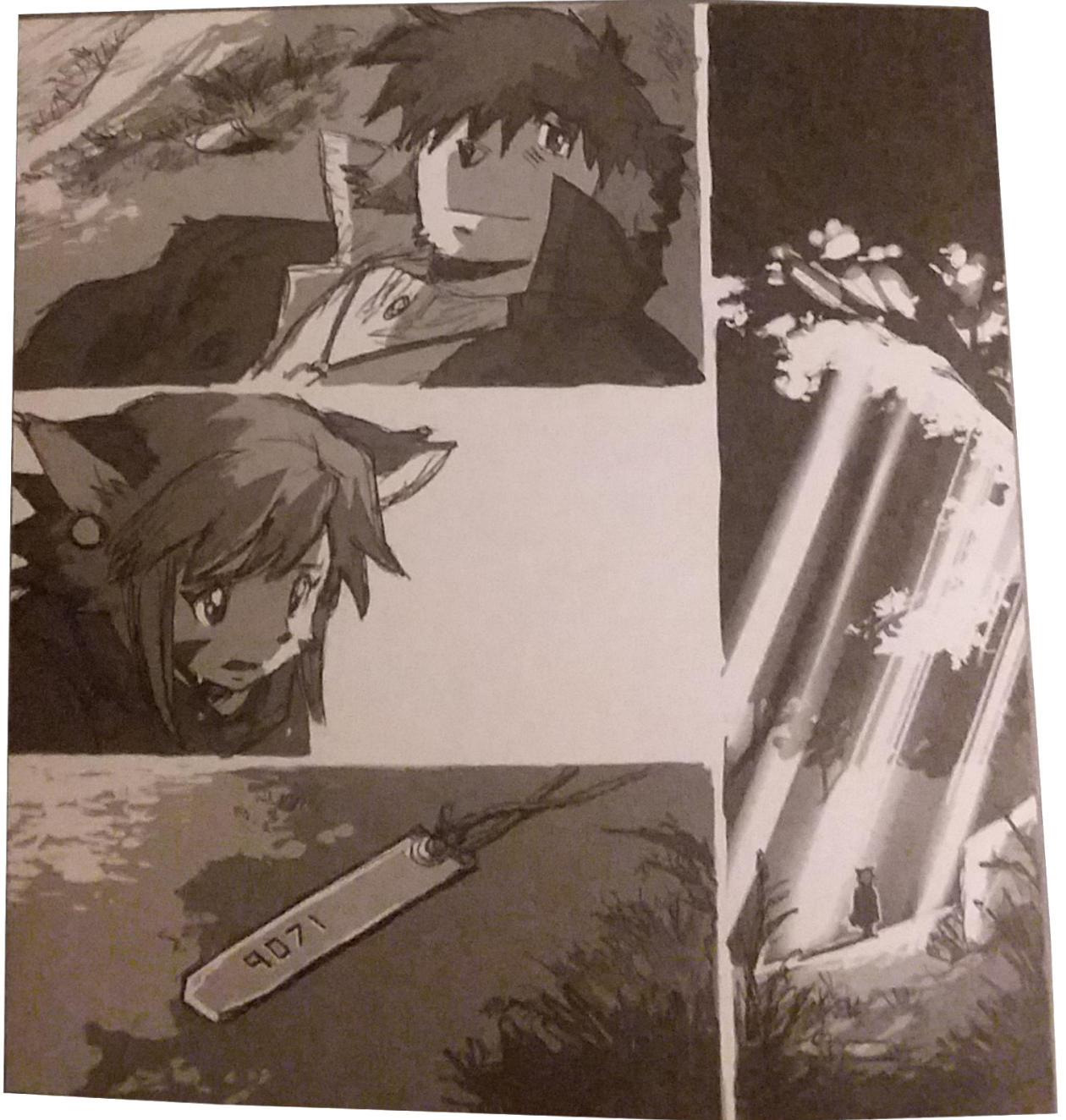
“!”

Elh attempted to shout the youth’s name.

However, she did not know what name to shout.

Eventually the whiteness in Elh’s eyes went out, and her vision returned.

The young man had fallen, holding the medallion on his chest. The medallion was gently fluctuating.



Elh staggered over to the youth.

“...You said it properly, didn’t you... What a shame.”

The young man laughed so as to curl his lips.

“You’re... lying.”

Elh bit her lower lip.

“You... made me angry, on purpose.”

“...When you entered the Sacred Realm... You were afraid the entire time.”

Elh suddenly remembered that when she was in the Sacred Realm, she had held the youth’s hand.

“My emotions... did you sense them?”

The young man shook his head.

“No... that power seemed to have already disappeared...”

“Then... why?”

“Your hands were trembling. Anyone could tell.”

Elh lowered her face, tears dropping from it.

“You’ve fulfilled your mission... Don’t cry.”

“Thank you... for your life.”

The youth’s body began to be wrapped in light.

“This is... the reason I was born... You gave my life meaning... Thank you.”

“!”

“Ah... This morning... is wonderful.”

All at once, the youth’s smiling body transformed into particles of light that scattered away.

With a loud clinking noise, the medallion and his clothes fell to the ground.

Elh slowly went to pick up the medallion. Below it was the metal tag engraved with the numbers ‘9071’.

Her wailing echoed deep into the forest, where no one would be able to hear her.

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“This is...!?”

Merveille was shocked by the sign of light reflected on the machines. The machines attached to both the girl wearing black and the boy wearing white sleeping in their small beds side-by-side, emitted a spark.

“What’s wrong Merveille?”

“Strong external antiphase waves interfered with the two who succeeded in their synchronization experiments with Lemures... They seem to have received a little damage.”

“Then restore them. Besides Numbers 1 and 2, no one met the standards of the final synchronization. As I expected. Repair those two and discard the rest.”

Merveille made no attempt to hide her frustration as she raised her voice.

“That’s unnecessary, Baion! Even if they don’t meet your standards, those children have plenty of potential left! Give them the possibility of another chance! It’s not just personal progression, but scientific progression, as well—”

Baion’s eyes shone sharply.

“Hoping for the possibility of better results will only result in more failures. If either ‘Nero’ or ‘Blanck’, are used to revive ‘Tartaros’, then this flawed world will be judged and descend!

Merveille quietly left the room, muttering to herself,

“It seems it was I... who made a mistake.”

Hearing the laughter of Baion from the room she had just left, Merveille trembled.