# 1 - Last Exam of the First Year (3)

How beautiful is the sight of someone who knows when to leave… ‘Wow… look at the kids disappearing in an instant…’

Students slowly began to leave, one by one.

They were probably all going to take their exams.

It was only natural since there was no reason to stay here anymore.

Since the exams were different for each department, there was no need to stay in the classroom.

Everyone just had to go to their designated exam room, take the written test, and leave.

‘This is exactly the same as the exams I took…’

In the game, you just started the exam, and after a little time, a notification popped up saying the exam was over, along with your score.

Seeing it like this, it felt new again. “Then, I’ll be going now.”

“Good luck on your exams, everyone~” “You’re coming with me, Uriel…” “Oh, right…”

Well, the exams were different for each department. Stella was the only one who had to go alone from here.

Uriel and Evan would go to the Swordsmanship Department to take their exam, and Stella would go to the Magic Department.

“See you later, Aria~”

Uriel greeted me with a smile, and I returned the greeting. I hoped everyone would do well on their exams.

Actually, when it came to defeating the Demon King, it didn’t really matter how high your exam scores were.

In the first place, an exam was just a day to confirm how much effort you had put in until that day.

It’s not like you suddenly get stronger just by taking an exam.

If you were going to get stronger, you would have gotten stronger while studying for the exam.

Still, since I’ve been attending the academy all this time, it would be nice to get good grades.

Of course, if you were good enough to get into Argent Academy, you would have studied hard, so there was no need for me to worry.

However, I was a little worried about Evan, who had to roll around here and there following me.

Unlike Stella and Uriel, who had plenty of time to study, Evan had to train incredibly hard as the Hero…

I had a good view of him using Divine Power Detection to try to use that skill he used during the Magic beast subjugation, and the power he had at that time.

He still didn’t seem to have a good grasp of it, but it would happen soon. ‘I wonder if he saw what the previous Hero… looked like.’

I don’t know how that pendant works, but in the setting, it’s supposed to contain the Thought-form of the previous Heroes.

If he saw the Thought-form of the pendant when learning the skill, it would have been the Thought-form of the previous Hero.

‘I’m a little curious too.’

In the game, it was just an illustration with the form of the Hero, and nothing was visible, so I couldn’t help but be curious.

The modeling wasn’t even properly done. Well… I don’t need to worry about it now. He seems to be growing smoothly…

If things go as I expect, he will become much stronger than he is now. I hope he doesn’t have a hard time because of me.

‘That’s an impossible wish, now that he’s confessed that he likes me.’

I had been trying to restrain myself as much as possible because I had given him too much mental shock that caused PTSD before, but this time it was a little too difficult.

My sacrifice was absolutely necessary, even to catch Maleficent.

Anyway…

‘Still, he studied hard…’

He couldn’t put off the exam, so he studied hard, combining training and studying from when there wasn’t much time left until the exam, so even if it’s hard to get a good score, wouldn’t it be okay to some extent?

It’s enough if I don’t get a failing grade.

‘Stella… said she had to get a high score…’

From Stella’s point of view, who doesn’t have any backing, she has to get a scholarship and use it to pay for her tuition in order to attend the academy comfortably.

She has to work hard for that.

‘The exam is coming up soon for me too…’

Unlike the other kids who are going to take the exam right now, I don’t need to go right away, so I can just say goodbye and wish them luck…

I’m taking it in the afternoon, so…

Actually, the person I should be most worried about here is myself.

The other kids have to memorize ordinary knowledge, but I’m a little different.

‘Ah… I don’t want to read the Bible…’ The Bible!

Yes, I have to take a test on what religious people must memorize.

If I were a real religious person, I would have blamed myself for being too lazy to memorize it properly, but I’m not a religious person.

Of course, I believe in God, but that’s only because I know that God really exists, so it’s a little different from the belief that religious people commonly talk about.

If you ask me why I didn’t memorize it, and say that I’ve been living too lazily, I’m a Saintess… Look at how hard I’ve worked to defeat the Demon King.

Frankly speaking, considering that I have the duty to defeat the Demon King, isn’t not memorizing the Bible not that big of a deal?

So, it’s a little unfair to say why I didn’t memorize it.

Anyway, I have to take the exam, and considering that I have to get a perfect score as a Saintess to maintain my image, it seems like it would be good to study a little more in the time I have left…

But there’s one problem left. ‘Where do I start studying…’

The exam covers the entire Bible…!!

It’s not like I was playing around when I was at the Cathedral, so it’s not like I don’t know anything about the Bible, but does it make sense to memorize everything from beginning to end?

Of course, for religious people in this era, it’s not just reasonable, it’s natural, so I had nothing to say.

No, doesn’t it make sense that a Saintess hasn’t even memorized that? Of course, it doesn’t make sense.

But it made sense while I was living until recently.

Until recently, no one asked me about the Bible just because I was a Saintess.

First of all, the meaning of Saintess is virtually someone who was directly chosen by God, the person who believes in God the most here and now, and the person who is receiving God’s favor, so isn’t it stranger to ask such a person about the Bible?

So, I could have memorized it at my leisure then, but the situation has changed a lot.

Here, I’m not a Saintess, but just a nun…

Like the other nuns, I have to take a test on the contents of the Bible.

It’s not that I didn’t memorize it at all. It was still enough to get a high score.

But…

‘Since I’m a Saintess, shouldn’t I get a perfect score…?’

The fact that I have to get a perfect score on this kind of exam because I’m a Saintess is holding me back.

Besides, I should go check in case I’ve forgotten anything, but there’s so much content on the exam that I don’t even know where to start.

If the exam comes out with something I don’t know, I’ll get that part wrong. Then, wouldn’t people doubt that I’m really a Saintess…?

‘I’m going crazy, really.’

Even if I read it until the afternoon, I wasn’t confident that I could memorize it all.

If I go on like this, I’ll just have to gamble and pray to the heavens to give me a perfect score.

Or…

‘What if I don’t take the exam at all?’

Now, not taking the exam and saying, ‘How dare you try to judge the words of the Goddess with mere sentences?’ doesn’t seem like a bad idea.

It feels a bit forced, but there’s no other way…!

It seems much better to take this forced approach than to get a question wrong on the exam.

Still, I’ve shown a lot of the aspects of a Saintess while living here, and I’ve subjugated a Demon King Army executive, so they won’t think, ‘Oh, the Saintess has gone crazy…’

They would rather question it. ‘Should I just not study?’

There’s so much content, if my score would change by studying for a few hours now, I wouldn’t be worried about this.

Then, wouldn’t it be better to just not study and rest to my heart’s content, and then act as I said earlier?

The more I think about it, the more it seems right. ‘I should just rest.’

I thought so and sat down to pass the time… but then I thought of another good way to kill time and got up from my seat.

I should go to the Theology Department infirmary.

Today is the day of the written exam, but if someone with a physical problem comes, they will definitely accept me if I say I came because of that.

And then I’ll rest there to my heart’s content. Hmm, that seems perfect.

Let’s go.

Of course, I couldn’t take the exam even if I wanted to because of my visual and auditory impairments.

They said they would give me a mid-level grade.

…

I was worried for nothing.

# 4 - Last Exam of the First Year

"Pfft... Kehehe..."

Stella couldn't contain her laughter upon hearing the story, giggling uncontrollably.

In the past, she might have pitied me, but the fact that I studied, thinking I would take the exam, seemed incredibly funny to her.

But I think that's better.

Than being pitied for not being able to take the exam because of my disability.

"I was curious... but I didn't expect you wouldn't take the exam at all." Evan also said, trying to hold back his laughter.

Just this morning, we were encouraging each other to do well on the exam, but instead of taking it, I rested in the infirmary until everyone else was done.

How should I put it... I should be happy, but I felt strange.

I had been worrying about how to speak well like the Saintess, or how to get away with it even if I didn't get a good score, but as the exam time approached, the reality that came to me was that I didn't need to take the exam because of my visual and auditory impairments.

...

That's reasonable.

When I think about it, I can only read books through the Thought-form flowing from them, and to others, it seems like I can't read at all, so they

probably thought it was impossible for me to take the exam. How could they ask such a student to take the exam?

It's natural that I can't.

They must know that, so they probably think I don't need to take the exam. But giving me a perfect score, considering I'm the Saintess, would be unfair, so they're giving me an intermediate score.

In the first place, academy scores don't matter to the Saintess, so it's not a problem.

Even so...

'Something feels strange...' It feels weird.

It's true that I have a disability, but thanks to this disability, which I'm usually so dissatisfied with, I've become a figure of pity.

I didn't intend for that to happen.

The only good thing is that people don't look at me with pity anymore, perhaps because they're used to it.

People with disabilities are just like ordinary people with minor inconveniences, but it's annoying when people constantly look at them with pity and make sympathetic faces.

I didn't used to care, but now that I'm the one experiencing it, I understand why...

Anyway, I want to stop talking about this. I should change the subject.

"[Did you guys... do well on the exam?]"

"Ah..."

Uriel shuddered.

Well, I expected Uriel to react like that, even if others didn't.

In practical skills, no one here can match Uriel's pure swordsmanship, but unfortunately, she only has talent for swords.

Unlike practical skills, her written exams are terrible... A genius who doesn't study.

She only knows how to move her body and doesn't study theory because it's too complicated.

That's just like Uriel, but, 'I hope she doesn't fail...' I'd be really sad if she did.

Well... if it comes to it, I'll have to ask them to be lenient, considering her performance during this attack.

"Stella, how about you? Did you do well on the exam?"

At Evan's question, Stella took out her exam paper and showed it to us as if asking the obvious.

Unfortunately, I can't see the exam paper... 'There's nothing written on it...'

Even if I try to read it, it looks like a blank sheet of paper with nothing written on it.

It seems to be magically treated to prevent cheating, which makes me feel even sadder...

"I don't know what it says, but if it's all circles, does that mean you got a perfect score?"

"As if I would get such an easy question wrong. Of course, I got a perfect score."

Stella said, proudly puffing out her chest.

She had a decent size, but unfortunately, the princess with national treasure- level proportions was right next to her, which only made me sadder.

'Me...'

Well, I barely have any.

While everyone was focused on Stella's exam paper, I briefly touched my chest, but it only bulged out a little and wasn't enough to appeal to anyone like the two of them.

And Evan likes me like this...

'It's not because of my body, is it?'

If he really likes me for who I am, and not my body, would he still like me even if my body suddenly became as big as Uriel's?

That's not going to happen, so it's a meaningless assumption.

"We've taken the written exam, so now all that's left is the practical exam?" "I suddenly got curious, Aria, are you taking the practical exam?"

Ah, that's right.

Since I said I couldn't take the written exam, it's natural to wonder if I'm taking the practical exam.

Should I go ask?

I briefly wondered if I could just ask another professor nearby, so I immediately approached a professor nearby.

The professor seemed startled and shuddered when I approached.

Judging by their appearance, they seemed to be a professor from the Magic Department... If I were in the Magic Department, I would know who they were, but unfortunately, I'm in the Theology Department, so I don't know.

I gave the professor an innocent smile and asked.

"[Professor, could you please find out if I'm taking the practical exam?]"

Normally, I should go and ask myself, but I thought this would be better than me going directly.

What would they think if the Saintess, who has visual and auditory impairments and the duty to defeat the Demon King, went to the professors who are busy preparing for the next exam and asked if she could take the exam?

I don't know what they would think, but I don't think I would get a good answer.

More than that, wouldn't it seem like I'm really looking forward to it if I went all the way to ask?

Well, still... Unlike the written exam, which I can't take at all, the practical exam requires me to move around, so maybe they'll let me take it.

What else would the students of the Theology Department do?

I can roughly guess that the practical exam will involve teaming up with students from the Swordsmanship Department and the Magic Department to do something.

If that's the case... I can move around using Divine Power Detection and Thought-form Detection, and I can also heal, so maybe they'll let me take the practical exam.

That's what I thought, but...

"[Ah... for healing...]"

It seems I can't take the practical exam either...

"The Saintess's power is not fair to the team... If an accident occurs during the practical exam, would you be able to use your power then?"

I was speechless, watching the professor say that they would never ask me to do such difficult work and that they would try their best to ensure that I could take the exam without causing any accidents.

As I was about to give up, I suddenly realized why they were preventing me from taking the practical exam.

'So I can go straight to where something happens...' Maleficent's attack happens during the practical exam.

What would happen if such a situation occurred while I was taking the practical exam?

My reaction would be at least one beat slower. I don't know what would happen then.

So Argent is using my disability as an excuse to prevent me from taking the exam.

That would explain it.

Of course, the written exam was blocked because I really couldn't take it, but I could take the practical exam if I wanted to.

The reason on the surface is that.

Asking if I could use my power if an accident occurred during the practical exam and so on.

Well, what can I do?

I'm the one who said Maleficent's attack would come.

Still, I didn't expect I wouldn't be able to take the practical exam either...

If I had known this would happen, I wouldn't have bothered preparing for the exam...

"What kind of exam is it that Aria can't take?"

"I know... I heard that this practical exam involves forming teams of one person from each of the three departments."

Ugh...

I can't tell them the truth... Well, what can I do?

I'll just have to watch the other kids take the practical exam.

Of course, I'm not just going to watch, I need to keep a close eye on the Demonic energy so that nothing happens.

And...

'Should I look for the Life Vessel?'

The reason why Maleficent is betting everything on this academy attack. And the reason why I have to sacrifice myself comes from here.

I have to find and purify the Life Vessel, which is like a lifeline for Maleficent, a Lich.

Evan's current level can't destroy it, so I have to step in. So then... should I go look for it?

In the game, it was set to appear randomly in a fixed location. It wouldn't be bad to find it in advance.

I secretly moved my feet.

# 5 - Last Exam of First Year

Life Vessel…

It's the weakness of a Lich, but it's ambiguous to call it a weakness. Would it be more accurate to call it a vital point?

Well, like a heart or brain for a human, it's an essential part for a Lich to stay alive.

Of course, if this Life Vessel is safe, it can be used for various things. Especially to use magic powerful enough to easily break through a Barrier created by a mage of the same caliber.

This is why Liches are strong against magic.

And it's also why this raid is the first and easiest raid in the game. After all, if we succeed in destroying the Life Vessel, we can kill

Maleficent, who has been constantly tormenting us, so in the raid, we can't help but focus on finding the Life Vessel.

From Maleficent's point of view, she must have bet everything on this academy raid, and of course, she has no choice but to use the Life Vessel to break through Argent's Barrier spread throughout the academy.

Even for a mage of the same caliber, if that mage created a huge Barrier over a long period of time, even a Lich who has lived for countless years would find it difficult to undo.

Even that high-ranking demon, who was the last resort to break the Barrier, was captured by Argent, spilled all sorts of information, and then died… Maleficent has no way to retreat other than this method.

Of course, it's not like she's attacking with her life on the line… Even Argent can't find out the exact location of the Life Vessel.

The opponent is also a mage who has reached the realm of Archmage, so she wouldn't reveal her weaknesses so easily.

It exists somewhere in the academy, but we can't just wander around this vast academy grounds looking for it.

And if we blow up the entire academy, it would be counterproductive, so we can't do anything about it, and naturally, finding the Life Vessel becomes the player's job.

In the game, Argent somehow finds traces of Demonic energy and tells the player, and the player's job is to follow those traces and find the Life Vessel.

Of course, the later we find it, the more damage we take, so we have to find it quickly, but how can a newbie find it so easily?

Naturally, the first playthrough is extremely damaging, so the academy becomes very chaotic.

Chaotic, or rather, the atmosphere of the game becomes much heavier than at the beginning, so for newbies who came in thinking of an academy setting, this is the first hurdle.

I suffered quite a bit back then too.

It's not like I came in because I liked the academy setting, so I liked the change in atmosphere because it felt realistic, but the game became more difficult than before, so it was harder than I thought.

Of course, after realizing that it appears randomly in certain areas, I reached the point where I could tell where it would appear just by looking at the location of the traces, so sometimes I could finish the raid as soon as it started.

Anyway, to sum it up, this raid can be cleared in an instant if you can find the Life Vessel as quickly as possible.

To do that, you have to know where it appears… In the game, the traces and locations were fixed, so it wasn't that difficult to find, but this is reality, so it might be different.

Of course, I don't think it will be different.

In the game, I didn't care because I thought it was just data, but now they're not just data, they're all living people, so I couldn't let that happen.

I don't like that kind of atmosphere either.

We're only halfway to defeating the Demon King.

It would be nice to have a fun academy atmosphere now.

Of course…

'To catch Maleficent, I have to step up again this time, so it's not a completely fun academy atmosphere…'

I smiled bitterly and walked down the road. How long had I been walking like that? "This isn't it, huh."

Believe it or not, I'm the Saintess.

If I get this close, no matter how hard Maleficent tries to hide it, she can't hide it from me, the Saintess.

My ability alone is enough to kill off all the guys with Demonic energy.

But if I can't see even a trace of Maleficent here, let alone the Life Vessel, it seems like it's not here.

Well, if it flows like it does in the game, it will appear randomly in one of three places, so there's no need to worry.

It's not like I can destroy it right away even if I find it.

I think I won't be able to prevent the academy from being attacked because I can interfere at the point when it's weakened to break the Barrier.

I've prepared in advance… 'I just need to find it.'

I just need to find it.

There's one problem…

'The academy… is too big…'

The academy is too big, so it's not easy to go around the whole place in one day.

I won't be using it during the written exam anyway, so I think it's okay to find it a little slower as long as I can find it before the practical exam starts.

With that in mind, I sighed and headed back to the dormitory.

Still, I put it in the outermost part of the outskirts to hide it as much as possible, so it will take a long time to walk back.

The sky is already getting dark just from coming here…

I can't wander around too much looking for something, because I don't want them to find out that I'm looking for something.

Hoping that the next location is the right one, I moved my feet.

"Where is Aria going?"

Stella's question made Evan and Uriel turn their heads to look at Stella. Stella's question was valid.

Aria had been acting strange since yesterday.

Unlike them, Aria didn't have a written exam to take, so she had plenty of time, but she was constantly spending that time elsewhere.

Of course, if it was being used for good things, her hobbies, or other things that didn't bother them, they wouldn't have any reason to be interested, but it was a little different.

She kept sneaking out and wandering around the academy grounds.

Aria, who gets tired easily even after walking a little, is wandering around so many places every day that she's always exhausted, which they couldn't understand.

Stella, in particular, couldn't help but wonder the most. She was the one who lived with her.

"Should we follow her?"

"... Don't. What are you going to say if you get caught following her… Aria might get angry."

"That's… true."

Stella scratched her head at Evan's firm words.

Evan's words were definitely valid, but the problem was that she couldn't just leave it alone because she had a feeling that something would go wrong again if she left it like that.

"Oh, did you guys hear the news?"

Stella, who was scratching her head and trying to get over the awkward atmosphere, said to the two of them as if she had just remembered something.

Evan and Uriel tilted their heads, showing their doubts.

"News?"

"They opened the practical exam hall, saying they'd tell us about the practical exam before we take it. I wanted to go with Aria if possible…"

Stella said that as if she was disappointed, but at that moment, Evan felt something was wrong.

There's no way Aria wouldn't know about that.

The fact that she disappeared somewhere at this time, just when the practical exam hall opened, felt strange.

Of course, Aria had been away since yesterday, but that's why it felt even stranger.

It felt like she was trying to do everything by herself again, like last time. Evan was sweating.

It's not certain.

There's no way I can feel it for sure.

I don't even know why she keeps wandering around, so how can I be sure?

But…

'I have to find her…!'

His senses were telling him it was certain.

Evan ran off in the direction Aria had disappeared, without even telling the two of them.

"E, Evan?!"

Stella and Uriel were greatly embarrassed and ran after Evan.

Even as he ran, Evan kept sweating.

Please let nothing happen, I hope she's just away for some ordinary reason.

# 6 - Last Exam of the First Year

‘It should be around here…’

I arrived at the third location where the Life Vessel was in the game. ‘To think we both struck out twice…’

Even after the first miss, I told myself it was okay, that you can't expect to find it on the first try. But after the second, something felt off.

Finding it only on the third try meant we had terrible luck.

It was already a headache trying to find each other since we were quite far apart…

Couldn't they have let us find it on the first try? What was with the two misses?

Anyway…

‘Still, I guess I should be thankful I found it…’

If I found it as quickly as possible and neutralized it before the raid started, we could land a decisive blow as soon as it began.

With my power, I could only suppress it, so Evan would have to step in and destroy the Life Vessel himself…

It's practically spoon-feeding him, so if he can't do that, then there's no hope…

“Haa…”

I sighed and arrived at the last storage location, looking around.

An eerie silence, but a small yet ferocious Demonic energy was swirling around, undetectable to anyone but Aselina and me.

‘Bingo.’

My prediction was correct.

I smiled as I saw the Life Vessel hidden among the rotten trees. ‘They thought it would be hidden in the academy's back mountain.’

The only places to hide it were here, the old buildings on the outskirts of the academy, or underground. I'd already searched all those places.

The fact that I couldn't find it meant it had to be here.

Even if it was somewhere else, I'm practically a perfect counter against demons, especially against the Lich, Maleficent, a high-ranking member of the Demon King Army.

There's no way I wouldn't find it.

They even tried to hide it as much as possible, concealing its presence so that only Aselina and I could find it. I should almost praise them for that.

They made it so that you wouldn't notice it unless you were close, so they must have been confident that even with the Saintess attending the academy, it wouldn't be found.

They overcame the type disadvantage and succeeded in hiding it. But what a pity.

I know all the places you're hiding.

There's no need to worry about the hiding place being different.

It's not like I've been constantly visiting the places where they planned to hide it. I've been living normally and secretly came here just before the

planned attack, so there's no way they could have noticed, even if they wanted to.

That's why I was able to find it so easily.

Well… easy is a stretch, considering the two places I just went to were empty, meaning I had to search more places.

‘Now, what should I do with this…’

Since the attack hasn't started yet, it might be best to just leave it at knowing its location…

‘But what if the location changes in the meantime…’

I didn't spread any Holy Power around, so there's no chance they'd notice, but if they had a way to find out, it would be a disaster. It wasn't easy to decide right here and now.

However, taking action on the Life Vessel right now was a risky gamble, and I wasn't sure if I should do it.

‘Yeah, it's best to leave it as it is.’

If I were a more powerful Saintess, I could destroy Maleficent right now by messing with the Life Vessel.

Since it's hidden in a place like this, there's nothing they could do even if I messed with it here.

But if my level is low, the story changes.

No matter what, it's their lifeline, so it's hard to believe they wouldn't have set up some kind of defensive magic. If I carelessly touched the Life Vessel here, I'd likely be caught in the prepared magic.

Maleficent has faced many Saintesses before, so she definitely knows my characteristics.

I don't know what kind of magic she set up, but it's likely a form of magic that forcibly poisons me with Demonic energy, like a toxin, to neutralize me.

If I can't overcome that, the raid will fail!

That's why I couldn't decide right away and had to think about it. I was pondering what to do when…

Swoosh… “…?!”

I remember it being quiet and not emitting any Demonic energy until just now…?

Why is it suddenly causing this phenomenon?

Could it be…

‘Did, did they notice I came…?!’ That's impossible.

Unless they're watching me directly, there's no way they could know I found this.

I tried to check the surroundings with Divine Power Detection, but the amount of Demonic energy emanating from the Life Vessel was already far from normal.

I was momentarily taken aback by the Demonic energy that had already filled the surroundings, but I instinctively knew that this wasn't a trap set because they noticed I was here.

The Demonic energy was disorganized, not something aimed at triggering a trap.

Nevertheless, the Life Vessel containing the Lich, Maleficent, who possessed such ferocious Demonic energy that she was called a high- ranking member of the Demon King Army, was emitting power right in front of me, and my legs were gradually losing strength.

I felt nauseous.

The stench was vomit-inducing… as if poison was spreading throughout my body, taking control of me.

“Kuh, haa… hng… cough…” This is…

This sensation…

The pleasure I felt when that demon directly invaded my body with Demonic energy…

I barely managed to hold back from wetting myself from the pleasure that was turning my mind blank, and I knelt down.

This won't do.

It didn't seem intentional, but if I stayed like this, it would be the same as being neutralized here according to Maleficent's plan.

I don't know why it activated, but I can't just stand still. ‘Sorry, but…’

I've been preparing for this kind of situation…! I took out all the Relics I had been saving.

‘Healing Holy Power… Purifying Holy Power…’

Filled to the limit, a Lich-specific remedy prepared just for this moment.

Try to survive this, Maleficent…! “Haaah…!”

I clenched my fists tightly and swung them at the Life Vessel without hesitation.

With a gruesome tearing sound, my fist pierced Maleficent's heart. And then,

Fwoosh! “Hnnng…!”

Holy Power burst from my fist with a blinding light, and at the same time, Demonic energy gushing from the heart began to invade my body.

“Ghk… guhh…”

I trembled as I felt the excruciating pain rising up my arm and the Holy Power being corrupted.

The pleasure, incomparable to anything I had felt before, traveled up my arm, past my spine, and into my brain.

‘Th, this is… insane… ugh…♡’ I, I can't do this…

The Demonic energy could be sufficiently overcome with the Holy Power contained in the Relics, yet I was controlling myself, not revealing my full power, and trying to feel more pain.

Unconsciously, to feel even more pleasure. I knew I shouldn't, but I couldn't stop.

I was trying to enjoy the pain while maintaining my persona, but this pleasure was so intense that it was hard to choose either.

I thought it was unbelievable when I felt a fragment of pain back then, but considering that it was only Demonic energy from a high-ranking demon comparable to a top-tier one, this was even more intense.

The concentration of Demonic energy alone was incomparably denser than before, and it was trying to invade my body more violently.

If an ordinary person were exposed to this Demonic energy, their body would melt away in an instant.

They would melt away as if exposed to overwhelming power, without even being able to transform into a Magic beast due to the Demonic energy. It was no wonder it was the Demonic energy of a Lich who had reached the realm of a great mage.

This… I might not be able to withstand it…

In the end, I couldn't stand for long and collapsed on the spot.

Maleficent's heart was desperately trying to survive, but thanks to the Holy Power I had stored in the Relics, the power of the Relics, and my skill… the purity of the Holy Power due to the fact that I was a Saintess, I was barely maintaining the balance of power.

However…

‘Neutralization… successful… ly…”

I wouldn't be able to move for a while. I couldn't see or hear anything.

I couldn't use Divine Power Detection or Thought-form Detection.

It was as if I had fallen into a dark space and was facing eternal torment.

I lay on the floor, groaning in pain from the Demonic energy.

Argent and Evan must have already noticed the Holy Power explosion from earlier…

That's… enough…

# 7 - Last Exam of the First Year

Bang!

"W-What was that?!"

Stella shouted, startled by the sudden loud noise.

It was a sound that was hard to imagine coming from the academy. Because it sounded like something exploding.

"What could be happening at the academy...?" Uriel muttered with a worried expression.

Her concern was valid.

Considering what had happened at the academy so far, it wouldn't be that strange if something happened during a Trial.

Of course, that didn't mean she was expecting it to happen.

This generation was the golden generation, a generation where the Hero and Saintess were attending the academy, so she just understood that demon attacks would be concentrated on them.

But…

"That explosion wasn't in the academy."

The three of them had come outside briefly to look for Aria, so they knew.

The explosion had happened in the mountains behind the academy, not in the academy itself.

"Why would there be an explosion in the mountains...? I have a bad feeling about this. We should go check it out."

"Wait a minute. Something seems to be happening at the academy..."

At Stella's words about the academy being chaotic, Evan asked in an anxious voice what she meant.

"Well... the flow of Demonic energy is strange... It's not how the academy usually is..."

At that moment, Evan's eyes widened. "Get down!"

At the shout to get down immediately, he grabbed Stella and pulled her aside, and in that instant, a thorn grazed Stella and pierced the wall.

Stella, sweating as she stared at the building that had been pierced like tofu, turned her head to look at where the thorn had come from.

Kikikik…

The thorn that had just been launched made a strange noise as it regrew from its body, as if it could regenerate as many as it wanted.

"That's..."

"A low-level demon..."

Stella and Uriel looked shocked at Evan's words.

Why would a low-level demon be inside the academy?

"There have been high-level demons before, but weren't they sneaking in?!" "Huh?! There was a high-level demon in the academy?!"

"Ah…"

Stella, realizing she had made a mistake, glanced at Uriel with a look of regret before sighing.

In any case, they couldn't just stand still like this. Evan drew his Holy Sword.

Hmm... What's going on...? I-Is that Demonic energy?!

Estel, who had been mumbling in a sleepy voice as if she had just woken up, shouted in surprise.

"Sorry, Estel. Can you help me out?"

Do you even need to ask what I can do to help? It's our duty to defeat demons anyway.

"That's... true." He was the Hero.

It was his duty to defeat demons. They weren't living beings like them, but simply nightmares that sought to destroy the world.

He couldn't just stand by and watch.

Evan shot forward in an instant and beheaded the low-level demon that had just launched the thorn.

The demon, belatedly realizing that Evan was charging at it, tried to swing its claws, but the Holy Sword was much faster in severing the demon's neck.

Ki, eeeck…

Leaving behind the demon that had been instantly killed with its neck severed, he shook the blood off his sword.

"Wow... you've improved a lot."

"Amazing, Evan!"

Stella and Uriel praised him as if they were impressed, and Evan, looking embarrassed, turned his head away for a moment,

Kikikik… Kill kill… Kehehehek…

Seeing the demons that began to appear one by one as if they had been waiting for him to draw his Holy Sword, Evan began to sweat.

Something was going strangely wrong.

"If there's more than one demon... could it be...?" A demon attack.

So, was it an attack by the Demon King Army?

When a single low-level demon appeared in front of him, he hadn't thought it would be this bad, but if there were this many low-level demons even on a path where people rarely walked, then the practical training grounds where students gathered would be…

'Hell…!'

A hellscape would have unfolded.

The reason Stella said earlier that the flow of Demonic energy was strange must have been for that reason.

But what was important now wasn't that problem. The mountains behind the academy…

That huge explosion of Holy Power that had erupted in the mountains behind the academy… That was too suspicious.

At this time, there was only one person who could unleash that much Holy Power.

Of course, if you were talking about someone who could spread that much Holy Power, there would be two people, but that person wasn't at the academy right now, was she?

"Aria is... she'll be at the center of that explosion." He didn't have any evidence, but he was certain.

Aria was there.

But…

"Stella, Uriel. I have a favor to ask." "A favor? Hey, Evan... don't tell me..."

Stella, as if realizing what he was about to say, tried to tell him not to say anything ridiculous, but Evan spoke faster than she did.

"I'm going to save Aria, so I want you to go back to the academy and see what the situation is like and ask Argen Headmaster for help."

Now that he knew where she was, he couldn't just go back like this. If he went back here, more time would be wasted.

Thanks to the necklace, he had awakened the Hero's power, so no matter how many there were, low-level demons were not enough to block the Hero's path.

But it was enough to buy time. "Please. I'll hold them off here."

"Tch... you really…"

Stella sighed as if she couldn't help it and approached Evan. Then, she hugged him briefly.

“…?!”

Evan, surprised by the sudden display of affection, was about to shout and ask what she was doing, but Stella's expression looked serious.

"Wait a minute. Like I said before, the flow of Demonic energy here isn't good, so I have to leave a clear mark like this."

"O-Okay…"

“… Done.”

She stopped hugging him and stepped back, but Evan was still staring at Stella with a dumbfounded expression.

"W-What! It can't be helped even if you look at me like that! What am I supposed to do, I'm worried about Aria too?!"

"Ah, Aria…?"

"I'm telling you in case you're misunderstanding, but the reason I hugged you just now was to imprint my magic on your body, okay?"

That was…

At Stella's words, Evan was finally able to notice that he felt some strange Demonic energy in his body.

'This is... magic I've never seen before?' When did she create magic like this?

"And anyway, I know you like Aria and I don't particularly like you, so it's better not to misunderstand for Aria's sake."

“… Then the magic is…”

"Tracking magic. To be exact, it's magic that obtains your spatial coordinates using you as a medium. I've developed it much more than last time, so you don't have to worry about making a mistake."

"Last time, you mean…"

"When... when you guys went to the mountains behind the academy." Only then could Evan remember when that was.

Come to think of it, when they went to receive the Trial of Strength, Stella had suddenly appeared just as they were finishing up.

At the time, he had just brushed it off…

"Anyway, I'm worried about Aria too, but if I don't tell the academy that something happened to Aria here, I have no choice but to listen to you. Got it?"

“… Yeah, I got it.”

Stella said that, but she scratched her head for a moment, as if she was still uneasy about having hugged him, and asked him once again not to tell Aria.

Of course, Evan had no intention of doing so either, as Aria might misunderstand again if he told her that Stella had hugged him.

"If the Demonic energy here wasn't so ambiguous, I wouldn't have done this…"

"O-Okay?"

"Never mind. Explaining it here will only make the atmosphere even stranger. We'll go first."

Stella said that and led Uriel next to her and started walking.

First, they had to get out of here and explain the current situation to Argen first.

She didn't know what kind of demon had attacked, but in any case, the one with the strongest power and authority in this place was Argen Isis, the headmaster of this academy.

Evan's gaze, which had been glancing at Stella and Uriel, who were quickly heading towards the academy, turned towards the demons in front of him.

While gathering Holy Power in his Holy Sword. "Shall we start with suppressing them first?"

Feeling the Holy Power starting to circulate in his body little by little, he shot out sword energy to suppress them first.

In a one-versus-many battle, it was practically essential.

Before the demons, who were being cut down by the sword energy, could even prepare themselves, Evan rushed out without hesitation.

In order to punish the demons who had appeared in this place and were disturbing the peace as soon as possible.

And…

'Just wait a little longer…!'

Even for Aria, who might be fighting some kind of battle alone in that place.

# 8 - Last Exam of the First Year

"A, an evil spirit!" "Run away!" "Kyaaaa!"

Amidst the pandemonium unfolding within the academy, professors tirelessly cast spells to defeat the evil spirits, striving to save as many students as possible, but it was not enough.

Though they had appeared suddenly, their numbers were unbelievably vast. "T, this won't do! There are too many of them!"

"Kuk... This is terrible..." It was then.

Light emanated from the bracelets worn by the students, and one by one, the students who had been fleeing from the evil spirits began to disappear.

"T, this magic is... Argen Headmaster's magic!"

"The magic from earlier was definitely Teleportation magic...!" Why was Teleportation magic being used here?

There was only one answer.

The device in the bracelets, created as a precaution for the students' safety, had been activated.

They had no idea what kind of magic had been applied to the bracelets, but the identity of the magic circle was Teleportation magic.

"As expected of Argen Headmaster...!"

If all the students could be sent to a safe place through that magic circle, they would no longer need to control their power.

The reason it had been difficult to properly confront the evil spirits until now was that if they used magic with strong power, the students might get caught up in it, which would be a disaster.

Including the instructors of the swordsmanship department, who originally didn't need to hold back because of the students, it was now the turn of the academy's professors to step forward and drive back the evil spirits.

Kee, keeik? Kuaaaa!!

As the students they had been trampling on disappeared one by one, the evil spirits were bewildered, their previously relaxed expressions gone.

Soon, they realized that only those who could easily kill them remained in this place, and the evil spirits screamed and tried to escape, but it was far too late.

They began to use high-powered magic that they had not used until now.

They had been unable to use high-firepower magic because of the presence of the students, but with that obstacle gone, there was no need to hold back at all.

Whoosh!

"Die, you monsters!" "[Fire Explosion]!!"

Kieeek! Kieeeeeeek!!! Kuaaaa!

Glug... Gluglug...

Magic with firepower that was incomparable to when the students were being held hostage was unleashed from the staffs.

In the end, they turned to ashes and disappeared one by one without even being able to struggle against the overwhelming power.

"Wow..."

"That's amazing magic..."

Stella and Uriel, who were watching the scene, muttered in disbelief.

They felt that the magicians working as professors at the academy were different for a reason.

'I knew they were extraordinary people even when I was taking classes...'

Even lower-level evil spirits, which were not easy to defeat unless one was a priest or inquisitor with Holy Power who could aggressively utilize the Holy Power of Purification, were beings that could be destroyed with a single spell.

It was only natural.

They were firing high-level magic without incantation.

Although the firepower was relatively weakened in the case of no incantation, it was clear that firing high-level magic without incantation was an incredible feat.

Using high-level magic without incantation was an area of magic that even she could not do. It wasn't entirely impossible if she used memorized magic, but that was it.

She could use intermediate magic without incantation, but from high-level magic onwards, she could not use it without incantation unless it was memorized, which showed the difference in skill and realm.

"It's a bit late to realize, but... I can feel that this is Argent Academy, the best academy in the empire..."

The only part that felt realistic was that it was not easy for students to deal with lower-level evil spirits.

Even then, most of them were too busy running away to even think about fighting them.

However, seeing that second- and third-year students who could use magic to deal with lower-level evil spirits were gathering in groups to subjugate them, it didn't feel realistic again.

Due to the nature of Demonic energy, magic below a certain level was ineffective, so first-year students were too busy running away to even think about subjugating the evil spirits.

There was a reason why she didn't do much damage other than a slight shock when she used the high-level magic [Rising Spear], which she couldn't even use without incantation, on the high-level evil spirit last time.

It could be said that she gave enough damage to be called a slight shock, but the power of Rising Spear that she knew was not that level.

That level of power was only seen in intermediate magic. 'Someday, I will...'

She would definitely grow up like that. Stella secretly resolved.

"S, Stella! First, we need to ask where Argen Headmaster is!" "Ah..."

While watching the magic they were using and recalling the memories of that time, she almost forgot her original purpose. Stella, who finally

remembered the reason for coming here at Uriel's shout, approached a professor who had just finished subjugating the evil spirits in this area.

"Hmm? A student? It seems you're not wearing a bracelet."

A professor with a plump body approached, surprised that they were here. "Professor Alfred..."

"Yes. Are you hurt anywhere? You can rest assured now. It seems like neither of you are wearing bracelets, so let's go with us."

He pointed out that they were not wearing bracelets and said that he couldn't leave them alone, so they should move with them.

But there was a more important issue than that right now. "Professor Alfred, do you know where the Headmaster is?"

"The Headmaster? If it's the Headmaster, he should be going around trying to save students who aren't wearing bracelets..."

Oh no... Why now of all times... No, it's only natural.

Even Argen wouldn't know what happened to Evan and Aria, so it would be a priority to save the students who didn't wake up the bracelets faster.

That's the obvious thing to do, but... 'This won't do...'

They don't know what's happening to them right now, and they need to go save them as soon as possible, but they don't even know where the Headmaster is.

As she was stamping her feet, wondering what to do, another professor who had finished cleaning up the evil spirits approached them.

"I'll call the Headmaster. Can you tell me roughly what happened?" "Professor Robert. Is the cleanup finished?"

"Of course. It seems like all the students in this area have been Teleported, so let's hurry and help the Headmaster save the students in other places.

Before that..."

The professor called Robert turned to them.

"It seems like you're looking for the Headmaster..."

"But... aren't they still students? There's no need to find him just because they're looking for him..."

"Take a closer look, Professor Alfred." "What do you mean..."

The professor's gaze, which had been scanning Stella and Uriel as if wondering what that meant, was filled with astonishment.

"Y, Your Highness...?!"

"If Her Highness Uriel is looking for the Headmaster, there must be a good reason."

While the two people who had grasped the seriousness of the situation were talking to each other, Uriel, who still didn't seem to understand what was going on, tilted her head...

"Uriel... Tell the Headmaster that you have something important to say. You can do it."

Stella, who quickly grasped the situation, said that to Uriel, and Uriel said to leave it to her and approached the two people.

"I have something urgent to tell Argen Headmaster... Is that not possible?"

"... Please wait a moment."

Professor Robert, who nodded at those words, closed his eyes and used magic.

Originally, it would be impossible to contact each other when they were so far apart, but they were carrying magic tools that helped them contact each other in preparation for the upcoming exam.

Of course, it was one of the things that Argen had prepared in order to prepare for Maleficent's attack.

After a while, Professor Robert smiled and turned to the two of them. "He received the call. He said he's coming this way soon."

Stella, who heard those words, let out a sigh of relief and muttered that it was a relief.

Time was gold right now, as they needed to go save Evan and Aria as soon as possible.

# 9 - Last Exam of the First Year

"What? Aria disappeared, and Evan went to save her...?"

Argent muttered in astonishment at Stella and Uriel's explanation. Stella and Uriel nodded.

"This is..."

Argent lowered her head and muttered. It was a disaster.

She couldn't believe that Aria had disappeared at a time like this. "Is there a problem? What exactly is Aria..."

"Aria probably went to stop the demons alone." Stella and Uriel's eyes widened at Argent's words. "So, someone is behind this?"

Argent nodded at Stella's question.

"Aria has been predicting that a Demon King Army executive would attack during the exams for a long time. Her disappearance this time was probably to prepare for that attack in advance."

Having come this far, Argent couldn't help but know who had done this. There was no way she wouldn't know.

This vicious and ferocious Demonic energy, the countless number of low- level demons released inside the academy, and even the release of mid-level or higher demons in places where students gathered.

It was clear that Teleportation magic circles were formed everywhere.

The only magician who could commit such an act was a great magician like herself.

"Maleficent... it's that bastard's doing." Argent chewed her lip and muttered. "Male... ficent..."

Stella and Uriel were shocked to hear the name.

Especially in Stella's case, she knew what kind of being Argent was referring to, so she couldn't help but be even more surprised.

"Maleficent... the Lich Archmage...!"

"Lich... Archmage?! Wh-Why did Aria go to stop him alone?! He's a Demon King Army executive!"

Uriel, who heard Stella's muttering, looked back at Argent with a shocked expression and asked.

However, Argent didn't know everything either.

She only knew that demons would attack when the academy held the exam this time, and she was preparing for it.

However, one question still remained.

'Aria clearly said that the attack would start when the practical exam started...'

But the attack had already begun before the practical exam had even started.

Argent, who had prepared by listening to Aria's advice that the attack would come when the practical exam started, couldn't help but wonder.

Of course, it was said to be a prophecy based on Divine Revelation, so she couldn't say for sure, but Aria's advice had become unbelievable.

As a result, it couldn't be said that it was completely wrong since the attack did happen anyway.

"Damn it... this is a big problem."

Argent sighed, holding her complicated head. She wanted to go save Aria and Evan right away.

It might be a bit much to say, but saving Aria was ten times more important than saving the students. If she could save Aria and restore the academy to its original state, she could just revive the dead students.

Yes, from an efficiency standpoint.

But as a teacher, as the headmaster who teaches students at the academy, she knew that she shouldn't think that way.

Just because Aria was more important, she couldn't stand by and watch the students suffer and die.

What should she do?

As Argent pondered for a long time, she suddenly saw Stella. 'This child...'

She had been with this era's Saintess and Hero last time as well. Uriel was the same.

And...

'Come to think of it, this child... was researching space Teleportation magic.'

She suddenly remembered that she was researching magic that could create a mark and accurately Teleport to that location.

If it was that magic,

If she used that magic, maybe these two could do it without her having to go help.

That's what she thought. "Stella... was it?"

"... Yes?"

Argent smiled slightly as she looked at the girl who was startled when she was pointed out.

"How far has the research progressed on that mark space Teleportation magic you showed me last time?"

"Ye-Yes? Why are you asking about that all of a sudden..."

"I'd appreciate it if you could tell me quickly. Time is running out." Stella looked dumbfounded at Argent's words, then fell into thought. Soon,

"It's still ambiguous to call it complete, but it's much more stable than it was at that time, and the Demonic energy required is also much less than before, so I can use it multiple times. There's no need to worry about failure..."

That's enough.

Argent smiled with satisfaction.

"Give me your hand for a moment. Uriel." "Ye-Yes?!"

"Please."

Uriel hesitated at Argent's words and reached out her hand. As Argent took her hand, immediately after,

"Ugh...?!"

She felt an enormous amount of Holy Power leaving her body.

Uriel knelt down and gasped for breath at the power that had left her in an instant.

"This should be enough."

Argent took out a ring with a magic stone embedded in it from her pocket. "Take this."

"This is...?"

"It's a top-grade magic stone." "To-Top-grade magic stone?!"

Stella shouted in shock at Argent's words.

A top-grade magic stone, a magic stone with the best efficiency among magic stones, said to be able to store enough Demonic energy to use transcendent magic multiple times.

"I'm sorry, Uriel. I don't have enough Holy Power to use here. I guess I took a lot of your Holy Power. I hope you understand."

"It's... okay..."

Argent looked down at Uriel, who was smiling awkwardly while gasping for breath, with a proud expression and stroked her head.

Cute kid, Argent muttered to herself and turned to look at Uriel and Stella. 'These two... might be able to do it.'

No, they have to be able to.

Argent handed the necklace to Stella.

"You can use the Holy Power in here to save the students. Attack magic and defense magic are also imbued in case the demons attack, so use them well. It's unlikely to run out easily. And..."

Argent approached Stella and placed her hand on her head. Immediately after, Stella felt familiar coordinates entering her head. "Can you do it with this much?"

"... Of course."

She even knew what coordinates they were.

Now that the mark had been directly engraved in her head, there was no need to worry about failure.

Stella smiled with satisfaction at Argent's question.

"Take Uriel to the shelter I set up in advance first. I took out as much as I could, so she won't be able to move for a while."

"I will."

"Then... I'll go save Evan and Aria soon."

It was the first time she had entrusted such a task to the students.

She had vowed not to make the students do such things after that day, not to let such things happen again, but in the end, it turned out like this.

Argent had a wistful expression and wished inwardly. Please, let nothing happen.

"Haa... haa..."

He had barely defeated all the numerous low-level demons blocking the way.

The low-level demons themselves didn't have that much power, but if they rushed in like a flood, he would naturally get tired from defeating them one by one.

In fact, the quantity was infinite, but Evan's stamina was bound to be overwhelmed.

Evan gasped for breath, his stamina gradually failing and scratches appearing here and there.

Being wounded by a demon was a great pain in itself.

Since he was the Hero and was constantly supplied with Holy Power from the Holy Sword, there was no major problem with Demonic energy entering his body, but the pain was indescribable.

"Hoo... at this rate..."

Evan gasped for breath and looked down at the corpses of the numerous demons that had fallen behind him.

Looking back at the corpses of the demons that had melted away from the Holy Sword's Holy Power, Evan steeled his resolve once again. Now that he had come this far, he couldn't back down, he would definitely save Aria and return.

As he resolved... he was almost at the place where Aria's Holy Power had exploded.

But...

"What... is this Demonic energy..."

The closer he got, the more he felt an indescribable, disgusting energy.

With Aria's Holy Power, he shouldn't be feeling this much Demonic energy...

But...

Crackle crackle Rustle

"Th-This is..."

Something began to rise from the floor.

A monster with only bones, revealing red eyes, let out a silent roar towards him. Evan gripped his sword tightly at the sight of the skeleton monsters emitting intense Demonic energy.

He felt that something was very, very wrong. To save Aria, he moved forward.

Continuing.

# 10 - Last Exam of the First Year

Evan broke into a cold sweat as he stared at the monster before him. He didn't know exactly what kind of monster it was.

But…

"Skull Knight…?! Be careful not to get cut by that sword, Evan!"

Estel seemed to know what kind of monster it was and began to explain. The more Evan heard about the monster, the more his expression hardened.

Just by looking at it, as Estel said, he could tell it was an extremely dangerous monster.

The rusty sword in its hand and the skull that looked like it would crumble if touched might not seem very dangerous, but the armor covering its entire body, as well as the aura emanating from its entire being, was undeniably Demonic energy.

Just looking at the dark energy surrounding the sword, one couldn't help but realize that appearances could be deceiving.

'If I get hit by that, it's over…!'

Back when they weren't using magic in wars, they would often smear all sorts of filth on their swords to kill their opponents.

Back then, people said that just getting a slight cut from a sword smeared with filth could lead to days of suffering and eventual death…

But if a normal person could die just by touching it, then getting grazed by that sword, which was saturated with Demonic energy, would render him immobile.

Of course, if he became stronger, he wouldn't get cut by the sword in the first place, and even if he did, the Demonic energy wouldn't easily invade his body.

But right now, Evan was just a newly awakened Hero.

If he were exposed to that much Demonic energy, even a graze from that sword would mean defeat.

"The Skull Knight's weakness is its skull. Sever its neck with an attack imbued with Holy Power!"

'Only one chance…'

Evan nodded at Estel's advice that facing the Skull Knight head-on would be difficult due to its high-level swordsmanship.

'In that case…!' Evan burst forward.

The Skull Knight identified the human with Holy Power charging towards it as a hostile target and, with red light flashing in its eyes, swung its sword horizontally as Evan approached.

Evan, lightly ducking to avoid the blow, swung the Holy Sword from below to sever the Skull Knight's arm joint, but the Skull Knight anticipated this and parried the attack.

Evan's eyes widened at the physically impossible trajectory of the sword. "Dodge, Evan!"

Evan narrowly avoided the attack at Estel's scream and jumped back to create distance.

"What, what was that just now…?! The trajectory of the sword bent in a physically impossible way…!"

Unbelievable.

How could it wield a sword like that?

Evan broke into a cold sweat as he circled the Skull Knight, maintaining his distance.

Soon, he noticed something strange. 'Its arm joint… is twisted…?!'

Could it be that it was forcibly twisting its body with Demonic energy to move?

Even though it was an undead, it was still essentially a human body, so forcibly twisting its arm instead of moving it according to its original structure would weaken it.

It would become a structure that couldn't generate power.

But just now, it had displayed tremendous speed despite not moving according to its original structure.

'I need to be careful…'

Evan sighed and took a stance.

It was impossible to win with swordsmanship alone.

It wasn't that it was using an incredibly high level of swordsmanship, but the way it attacked was so unconventional that fighting like this would drag on.

Evan, who needed to rescue Aria as quickly as possible, didn't want to waste time with the Skull Knight.

In that case…

Evan gathered power into the Holy Sword while simultaneously gathering Holy Power into his other hand.

Unlike him, who could somewhat block Demonic energy on the surface, the Skull Knight was completely exposed. If Holy Power touched it anywhere, it would be a significant shock to the Skull Knight.

That was his plan. "Sorry, Estel."

"What? Wait, Evan, you…!"

Evan, covered in Holy Power and with Holy Power in his hands, took a stance and charged forward once more.

This time, he would attack in a slightly different way, focusing on incapacitation.

He didn't want to waste time, but recklessly rushing in to break through faster could lead to being countered.

In this situation, it was better to take some time to incapacitate it and then sever its neck to ensure victory.

In any case, in terms of raw power, he was stronger than the Skull Knight, so if they clashed head-on…

The Skull Knight, recognizing his approach, moved its arm once again to swing its sword at Evan, but this time, he had no intention of dodging.

Clang!

He openly charged in, and the Holy Sword clashed with the Demonic energy-infused sword.

However,

"As expected… it's tough…!"

It was impossible to block the Skull Knight's attack, which was wielding the sword with both hands, with just one hand.

No matter how much he covered his body in Holy Power to maximize his physical abilities, he couldn't overcome the difference in size.

But…

"Ugh! Evan?! Your power…!" "Just hold on a little longer!"

Estel was the Holy Sword with a will of its own.

After pouring Holy Power into it with one hand and releasing the power to allow Estel to block the attack, Evan quickly infused magic into the Holy Sword and extended his other hand, covered in Holy Power filtered from the Holy Sword, towards the Skull Knight's hand.

The Skull Knight, belatedly realizing Evan's attack, released its grip and tried to retreat, but it was already too late.

Crack!

The bones in both of the Skull Knight's arms, imbued with powerful God of Purification's Holy Power, shattered, causing it to drop the greatsword it was holding.

Then, "Haaap!"

He slashed the Holy Sword diagonally upwards, accurately severing the neck connected to the spine.

Evan panted, glancing at the sword energy cutting through the air and the Skull Knight's skull soaring into the sky.

"Khh… haa… haa…"

He felt a burning pain in his left hand, which had touched the Skull Knight's body.

He could see the skin on his left hand, invaded by Demonic energy, decaying and melting away.

It was just a slight wound on the skin, but the pain was immense.

It had only touched a part that was heavily surrounded by Demonic energy for a moment, and he had been covered in Holy Power, so it had ended like this.

"Are you okay…? The pain must be considerable…"

"It's okay… Aria has endured even greater pain than this." Even so, she always sacrificed herself for others.

He couldn't whine about something like this.

Evan gripped the Holy Sword tightly and walked deeper into the forest.

'Somewhere in here… there must have been an explosion of Holy Power somewhere in here…'

Where was Aria?

He continued to heal his painful left hand with Holy Power as he walked deeper inside when…

"... I can feel Holy Power."

Evan's eyes widened at Estel's words.

If there was a place where Holy Power could be felt in this place, it could only be where Aria was.

"Where, where is it!"

Evan shouted, and Estel, startled, told him the direction. How long had he walked in that direction?

Evan, having arrived at the place where the traces of Holy Power were last felt, pushed aside the slightly improved pain and looked around.

However… "What…"

The closer he got… "What happened here…"

The forest was losing its form.

The forest was so devastated that it was hard to believe it was the same forest that was behind the academy. The trees were withered, and black flames were rising.

The black flames, clinging to everything, were fiercely burning to find more to consume, emitting a ferocious energy.

Something was wrong.

This was supposed to be a place where Holy Power was felt.

It was supposed to be the site of a Holy Power explosion, so why did it look like this?

"Evan… th-there…"

Estel's trembling voice reached him.

In response, Evan turned his shaking eyes and looked down in the direction Estel was pointing.

There…

"A, Aria…"

Aria, with half of her body melted and decayed, was collapsed on the ground.

She was definitely being healed.

The Holy Power gushing fiercely from her heart was healing her body and purifying the surroundings, but the heart held in her right hand was also polluting the surroundings without giving in.

Thump! Thump!

The decayed heart held in her melted right hand was beating roughly in a chilling manner.

Furthermore, the decayed Demonic energy flowing from Aria's right hand was spreading to the surroundings.

The Holy Power constantly rising from Aria's body was constricting the heart, but even so, the Demonic energy still flowing from the heart had not lost its power and wanted to devour Aria.

Traces of tears could be seen flowing from one of her eyes, which had not yet decayed and had lost its vitality.

Each time it thumped, the ground was polluted. Each time it thumped again, Aria's body… "Ugh… urgh…"

Evan couldn't hold back what was rising and collapsed on the spot, continuing to vomit.

A disgusting smell stung his nose.

# 1 - Last Exam of the First Year (Intermission)

What on earth happened here?

Evan tried to look at Aria with trembling eyes, but couldn't bring himself to meet her gaze and turned his head away.

He knew that Aria wouldn't die even if she ended up like that, but the fact that she was collapsed in such a state was a great shock to him.

"Haa… haa…"

Evan! Are you okay?! Evan!!! "I'm okay… Ugh…"

He turned his eyes away, and although it had barely improved, the pungent stench remained.

What…

What on earth happened in this place?

Evan carefully turned his head again, so as not to be startled, and looked at the rotten, pulsating heart in Aria's right hand.

He didn't want to see it, but he couldn't resolve the situation unless he did. "It's not… Aria's heart, is it…"

She was holding it in her right hand, and starting from that right hand, only the right side of her body was exposed to Demonic energy, decaying and melting away.

So, it was hard to think that it was Aria's heart.

Then that means it's someone else's heart… 'A demon's heart…'

In fact, that was the only possibility.

But even if it was a demon's heart, for it to have enough power to make Aria, the Saintess, faint from not being able to withstand the Demonic energy flowing out of it?

Does that make sense? 'Then that heart is…'

At least it had to be the heart of a Demon King Army executive.

Aria fought an executive alone and won, extracting the heart, but the power flowing from the heart was so strong that she was overwhelmed?

'That's not it either…'

It was even harder to think that way.

If the power flowing from the heart was so strong that she was overwhelmed, then winning against the executive in the first place would be nonsense.

That means…

'This heart… was here?'

What kind of demon would take their own heart, not even from their own body, and secretly abandon it in the back mountains of the academy?

There's no way they would do that unless that heart played some important role.

But right now, he had to assume that they did.

Yes, if he thought of that heart as playing an important role in this attack, then Aria came here to stop that role…

And to block the energy flowing from the heart, she tried to purify it by touching it directly with her hand, but she couldn't overcome the immense Demonic energy and collapsed… Could that be the explanation?

"Keuk…"

Evan looked at Aria.

He knew that he had to judge the situation by seeing it with his own eyes.

But…

'I can't look…'

He had seen Aria hurt many times before. But this time it was on a different level.

He couldn't believe that he had to see a person melting away from being exposed to Demonic energy, especially someone he liked.

Especially the appearance of someone he thought would never happen to… "Ugh… ugh…"

Evan couldn't look at Aria any longer and turned his gaze away again.

As much as he liked Aria, her current appearance was too much of a shock to him.

It would have been a great shock even if they had just met.

There's no one in this world who would enjoy seeing the horribly melted corpse of half a girl's body.

Except for those who would vomit as soon as they saw it and carry it as a lifelong scar.

But if that person was a friend. If it was a girl he liked.

How great would the shock be?

Evan…

"I have to endure…"

The Hero who defeats the Demon King and brings peace to the world. He knew that was him.

He couldn't break down with just this. He shouldn't…

He knew he shouldn't… Evan slumped down.

He couldn't endure it.

There's no way he could endure this.

He couldn't do it anymore because it was too hard. How many times was this?

How many times was this?

Evan sat down on the spot and moved his legs little by little towards Aria, crawling.

"This… this… it's because of this…"

Evan barely controlled his mind, which felt like it was about to go crazy, and raised his Holy Sword towards the rotten, pulsating heart.

His eyes gleamed with madness. "It's… because of this…"

It must be because of this heart.

Evan gathered Holy Power into the Holy Sword.

If he could just smash this damn heart, even if Aria's hand would be smashed along with it, he could regenerate Aria's hand as long as he could smash the source of the problem.

Even though it was far away… and he had to draw Sword energy from the Holy Sword and fly it, so Aria's body wouldn't be safe either.

But anyway, if he could just destroy that heart that was constantly scattering Demonic energy, Aria would return to normal…

Evan! "Keuk…"

At the same time as Estel's shout, the Holy Sword shook violently and flew out of Evan's hand, embedding itself in the ground.

Evan stopped his movement to strike down with the Holy Sword that had left his hand and looked back at the Holy Sword with trembling eyes.

"What are you doing, Estel! We have to help Aria quickly!"

You're right, but calm down! This isn't a situation that can be solved by recklessly launching attacks!

"Calm down? You said calm down?" Evan's expression twisted.

Tears were flowing from his wide eyes.

"You… can you stay calm even after seeing that…?"

…

"How can I stay calm after seeing that! I feel like I'm going crazy! I'm already having a hard time having to defeat the Demon King, but why, why… is this happening to Aria… to me!!"

Evan half-shouted at Estel and covered his face with both hands.

His trembling shoulders were telling her what Evan's heart was like, what kind of feelings he was feeling.

"Estel… can't I… not be the Hero…?"

Eventually, Evan, who was leaning against a nearby tree and sitting down, lowered his gaze and muttered.

Evan…

"I don't really want to be the Hero… why, why… does it keep turning out like this…"

There are hardly any people in the world who want to be the Hero.

How many people would want to take that position, where the peace of the world… the lives of all people become a weight that presses down on their backs.

Even so, the fact that the Goddess and the Holy Sword designated Evan as the Hero meant that there was a good reason for it.

I despise myself for only being able to say 'hang in there'… but I can't help it… you have to do it.

"…"

If it's not you, this world will… be destroyed by the Demon King.

"If it's a world that will be destroyed by the disappearance of just one person…"

Evan…!

“… Okay, I shouldn’t say things like this.”

A world where everything is entrusted to him.

Ha, wouldn't it be better for such an irresponsible world to just perish?

What kind of God is the Goddess who entrusts the position of Saintess to a poor girl with visual and auditory impairments, and gives the fate of the Hero to a boy who didn't know anything?

He wanted to argue right away.

But…

"I never believed in Gods in the first place." Evan got up from his seat.

He didn't believe in Gods. He didn't want to believe.

If this was reality, if this was the truth, he could confidently say that even the most devout priests or nuns would have cracks in their faith in God.

But…

"I'm going to save Aria."

He only stood up again for that reason. He didn't need any other reason.

Even defeating the Demon King Army and the Demon King… it was all to eliminate Aria's disability. He didn't care about the peace of the world.

The reason I'm trying to defeat the Demon King as the Hero is because of a personal wish.

Didn't he make a promise even in the Trial of Wisdom?

That smile at that time, that expression she made while looking at me with her eyes open.

He wanted to hear Aria's voice again.

Evan reaffirmed that promise at that time in this place.

Of course, it's still difficult to face Aria's current appearance. But…

If he didn't do it, it would only become more dangerous. 'If I don't do it, it won't work.'

If he gave up and gave up everything here, that would be the end. What kind of state was this after confessing to Aria?

If he was going to confess to a girl who had declared that she would defeat the Demon King, shouldn't he be able to confidently say that he would defeat the Demon King first?

That's why he felt like he could do it now.

Holy Power began to rise from deep within Evan's body.

This is… Holy Power…?!

Estel exclaimed in a surprised voice.

Once before, this had happened.

When he awakened his power as a Hero… only at that time did Holy Power rise from within his body.

Could it be that he had regained his power from that time again? That was the moment she thought.

The necklace…?!

The necklace that Evan was wearing began to shine again.

The same light as last time, the moment this light shone last time, he had awakened his power as a Hero.

"…"

Evan closed his eyes, feeling that what was coming had come.

Before he knew it, Evan's consciousness had been transferred to a pure white space with nothing in it.

# 1 - Maleficent Subjugation (1)

This place is…

So, I ended up inside the necklace again, just like last time. Evan looked around, recalling the memory from then.

Come to think of it, I remember coming here when I first awakened the Hero's power… Back then, too, surely…

Are you looking for me? “…!”

Here it comes.

A man who looked similar to Evan, but somehow much more grown-up than he was now, was looking down at Evan with an expressionless face that conveyed nothing.

“I don’t think we properly talked last time… Who exactly are you?”

I thought you’d ask. Yes… It’s probably good to know at least some of it.

The man closed his eyes.

You probably know that this necklace isn’t ordinary. “That’s… Yes.”

I know it’s not an ordinary necklace.

Otherwise, it wouldn’t be possible to meet someone through the necklace like this.

But…

That necklace contains the Thought-form of the previous Hero. “That’s…”

But I didn’t know that much.

Aria had mentioned it before, but she hadn’t told me in detail, and Aria herself had only found out about it through ancient books.

Naturally, she didn’t know everything, so she didn’t know that it contained all the Thought-form of the previous Hero.

But…

“Why is a necklace with the Thought-form of the previous Hero in a place like that? It didn’t seem like any of the previous Heroes except me had ever used that necklace… Estel didn’t know about it either.”

Something was strange, according to what the man in front of me was saying.

Aria said that an ancient Hero used it, but Estel, the owner of the Holy Sword, didn’t know anything about this necklace, and it was even hidden in the back mountains where no one knew about it?

Only that you could get it if you overcame the Trial of Power… Even Aria only knew that much, and I got the necklace from a completely hidden place.

I was wondering about that at first, too. But if you think about it, isn’t it strange? They say the previous Heroes used it, but Estel didn’t even know it existed.

“…”

That’s right.

Estel didn’t even know it existed, but the identity of that necklace is something with the Thought-form of the previous Hero?

“Then what was it that came out until now…? Are you perhaps the ancient Hero?”

Evan instinctively knew that what he was saying wasn’t true, but for some reason, he felt like he had to ask.

Even though he knew that what he was thinking was absurd, he couldn’t stop asking.

The man, who smiled bitterly at Evan’s question, closed his eyes and answered.

… I’m not the ancient Hero, but as I said earlier, it’s true that I am the previous Hero.

The previous Hero…?

Evan looked up at the Hero’s face.

It’s hard to say this, but the face of the man who introduced himself as the previous Hero looked very similar to his own.

He looked much more mature than he was now, and he had the demeanor of a veteran who seemed to have gone through all sorts of hardships.

It was hard to believe that he was showing such a figure in a form similar to himself, of all people.

“Then why do I look so similar to you…”

It’s only natural that you look similar to me. The man continued as if asking what was obvious. The reason why we have to look similar.

Evan swallowed hard and listened to the next story. Finally, the man’s mouth opened,

I am… your future self.

Evan wore a blank expression and froze in place.

The academy, where many students had been happily walking around until just a moment ago, had somehow turned into hell.

No students had died.

The students who were in the place where the demons appeared were able to Teleport to a safe place through the bracelets they were wearing in preparation for the practice, and the remaining students were able to escape safely through the professors.

It was a miracle that it was possible in the first place because most of the students were in the training grounds.

But even if all the students had escaped safely, the fact remained that the academy, which was the students’ home and place of learning, was being trampled on in a miserable state.

Argent gritted her teeth as she watched the academy she had built over hundreds of years collapse.

“Maleficent…!!”

Then, she swept away hundreds and thousands of demons rampaging through the academy and shouted in an angry voice.

She couldn’t stand the sight of the demons constantly appearing even though she had to leave her position to save Evan and Aria.

But…

“H, Headmaster…!”

Stella’s call made her swallow her anger. Now is the time to be patient.

The professors would know how to defeat the demons and protect the students.

The academy can always be rebuilt after this is over, so it was right to focus more on the sprouts that would grow in the future rather than worrying about the academy now.

Argent put the Demonic energy she had been gathering to sweep away the demons back in and sighed as she turned to Stella.

“… Yes. You said you know where the coordinates are, right?” “Yes, I can Teleport right now.”

Argent nodded at Stella’s words and replied. “Please.”

No matter how angry she was, the first priority now was to go and save Aria and Evan.

She had to save them first to have a chance of winning this war. It was impossible for her alone to stop Maleficent.

The place where Aria said she was hiding the Life Vessel was the main body, and the other main body in the Demon realm would be preparing to manifest in the academy.

Before manifesting in the academy, she had to find the Life Vessel and destroy it.

“Then I’ll move…!”

Stella, who had confirmed that everyone was gathered, checked the coordinates and tried to use Teleportation magic.

However, “… Huh?”

She had definitely succeeded in confirming the coordinates, and there was definitely nothing wrong with the Teleportation magic to move there.

‘I can’t move…?!’

For some reason, she couldn’t Teleport there.

It was as if something was blocking it, and something was preventing the magic from being cast.

“What should we do…?! The magic isn’t being cast…!” Argent’s eyes widened at those words.

She should be able to use magic itself…

If a Barrier had been spread throughout the entire academy to make it impossible to use magic, not only her but also the other professors would have been helpless.

But the fact that it wasn’t meant that only moving in that direction was blocked.

In other words…

‘This isn’t a good situation.’ Argent said, sweating coldly.

“… It’s probably because of Maleficent’s Demonic energy. If my guess is correct, Aria is now fighting Maleficent’s Life Vessel.”

She said, recalling what Aria had said at that time. She moved to directly purify the Life Vessel.

Otherwise, the current situation could not be explained. “…?!”

Stella wore a surprised expression when she heard those words.

If what she was saying was true, then the huge Holy Power explosion that had just occurred meant that she had used it to fight the Maleficent, a member of the Demon King Army.

Since the Life Vessel meant the Lich’s heart, it was not certain whether Aria could properly deal with it yet.

Maybe…

“I don’t have a good feeling about this. I think we should go quickly.”

Argent must have felt uneasy as well, as she simply lifted Stella and Uriel with levitation magic.

“I want to tell you to go back… but in this situation, you’re the only one who knows the location of Aria and Evan.”

Argent, who was about to send the two to a safe place, suddenly realized that not only did she not know the location of Aria and Evan, but Stella was the only one who knew it, so she reluctantly singled out only Stella.

Getting the coordinates was also a way, but… ‘You’re not going to back down.’

Neither Stella nor Uriel had any intention of escaping from this place.

They had come all the way here to help Aria and Evan even a little more, so they couldn’t escape now.

“Yes… Let’s go quickly.”

Argent sighed inwardly, but praised the courage of the two and vowed to protect them, and moved at high speed towards the coordinates Stella had taught her.

It was okay since there was no direct clash with Maleficent anyway. ‘Life Vessel…’

I will definitely find it by reverse-calculating the location through that heart.