

Chapter 2 - Wendelin's Ordeal

"This is an underground ruin that had been created during the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization. Unfortunately, its degradation over-time is quite intense. There are only a few archaeological documents, too. Of course it does not hold any of the treasures you adventurers are looking for. Since it is located within Baulburg, it will be reconstructed into a guard garrison with a basement after you have inspected it today." (Arnest)

"No treasures, you say? That's bad luck."

"Cindy, even if treasures were here, I'm sure that they would have been carried out a long time ago."

"It's probably just as Agnes says. At a point in time when prep school fledglings like us can enter this place for training, it's obvious that the place will be cleared from treasures."

"So they've already been taken out...? That's really a shame."

"Limited to this place, there has not even been anything here that could have been taken out, little ladies."

The lessons of the prep school are basically carried out only within the school, except for a set number of events.

However, there are many underground ruins within the Baumeister Earldom. Among those, there are also some existing inside Baulburg.

The search and investigation of those ruins finished a good while ago. Same can be said about this underground ruin as well.

There are no treasures here, and we couldn't confirm anything of archaeological value as desired by Arnest or any traces of such because of the intense degradation, but since the underground part can be recycled, we've decided that it will be remodeled into a new garrison for the guards.

Given that the guard unit is an organization to keep up public order, having a warehouse or jail in the basement would be convenient.

The point of today's training is to allow the adventurer prep school's fledglings to take a peek at an underground ruin of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era before the reconstruction starts.

The one in the role of lecturer is Arnest who has hidden his long ears with a magic tool.

At first he was unwilling and acted all cheeky despite being no more than a freeloader, but once he learned about being able to investigate another, new underground ruin, he was all for it.

As Arnest had apparently also taught at a university, he gave faultless explanations to the students of the magician class.

Having said that, because this underground ruin is truly no more than a stone basement, the interest of the students seems low.

Seeing how they're aiming to become adventurers, it's only natural for them to desire finding treasures in an underground ruin.

"Everyone, since you can't enter places like this until you become adults, make sure to grasp the atmosphere of an underground ruin before going back today."

""Yes!""

There's like no way that prep school students would be allowed to enter an unexplored underground ruin. For now, a place like this is the limit.

"The atmosphere changes by just going underground, doesn't it? Even if it's simply learning about something like that, think of it as a good experience."

I explain to them that they should at least remember the atmosphere when going into the underground for the time being.



"Earl Baumeister, you will keep your promise, won't you?" (Arnest)

"A——ah, yeah, yeah."

Once that day's underground ruin field trip ended without any hiccups, Arnest strongly insisted on being allowed to help out in the investigation of new underground ruins as reward for having acted as temporary teacher.

For an earl like me, something like breaking a promise is an absolute no-go...just when I thought that, I actually had forgotten one very important issue.

"Elise and the others can't join right now, and if it's just me, it won't work, you know?" (Erwin)

"Come to think of it, there was that as well."

Until Erw pointed it out, I had completely forgotten about Elise and my other wives being on maternity leave.

Even though their bellies are sticking out pretty much by now...

Regretting to have made a promise that I couldn't keep, I suggest to Arnest to postpone it.

"Did you not say that nobles will keep their promises?"

"I haven't said that I won't go. It will be after Elise and the other give birth and recover their instincts as adventurers."

It might take two or three years, but it's not like I particularly lied.

Arnest can simply write plenty of thesis during that time.

"Therefore, it's not possible right now."

"Still that is not good. Because the Baumeister Earldom is dotted with countless underground ruins, I will be troubled if they are opened during that period of time."

What an unexpectedly hasty guy despite his longevity as a demon.

"Even if demons might live much longer than humans, that does not mean that they are particularly

patient either."

"But, you see..."

Since I don't want outsiders to know much about Arnest, I cannot afford entrusting him to other adventurers.

Because my retainers, who usually help out in the excavation, don't have the necessary combat strength, they are unsuited as companions, too.

"Humans and demons have to resign themselves to their fates at times."

"Ughh... Then I will change the request to a purely scientific investigation."

With those words, Arnest takes out a map and shows me an underground ruin located in a place that might as well be called just outside Baulburg.

"It's an underground ruin that has been discovered just the other day. Its safety has been confirmed through an investigation by the guards. Me and my disciples are in the process of applying for permission to enter that place. Thanks to the special trait of governmental offices to be always slow, I do not know when I will be given permission."

"You've just casually blamed me there, haven't you...?"

If it's an underground ruin next to Baulburg, it's not strange for the guards to block it off after an investigation.

Children might go in, or decorations and the building stones forming the ruin might be stolen, even if there's no treasures.

Recently we're lacking houses in Baulburg due to the rapid growth of the population. I've heard stories about the building stones in underground ruins being stolen as materials for such houses. Arnest's application not going through...is because only a few of my retainers know about this guy. There's absolutely no way for me to make a directive like 『Make sure to give him preferential permission to scientifically examine underground ruins because he's a demonic scholar sheltered by the Baumeister House』.

"Oh, the underground ruin over there, huh?"

"You know of it?"

Erw knows about the ruin Arnest mentioned.

"I think it's an underground ruin with only two floors and no treasures in it. The interior ornaments are very gaudy, so an archaeologist might like them."

In short, it doesn't have much of a monetary value, but its scientific worth is rather high.

"Then I'll go along with you to that place."

"With just us three?"

"Is that a problem?"

If the guards are watching that place, we just have to borrow some of their people.

"They have only stationed people to make sure that no one trespasses on the grounds there, so I think it would be a bit unreasonable to borrow those people. And even without that. The guards are already short on men as is, so it would be kinda pathetic if we increased their workload with something like that." (Erwin)

In that case, it'll be necessary to find personnel to guard me?

"It will not be a problem with those little girls." (Arnest)

"Little girls?"

"The three who are your pupils, Earl Baumeister." (Arnest)

Arnest is telling me to use Agnes and the other two as my guards.

"I am just going to do a preliminary investigation inside the underground ruin anyway. Since there will not be any danger, those little girls will be plenty."

Even though they're young, all three are magicians with a bright future ahead of them. It's not difficult to appoint them as guards, albeit only for form's sake. Since they are minors, it's actually not all that good, but I'm a noble and the lord of this land. Just as I had been assigned to the subjugation of Grade Grand as minor in the past, it won't be a problem even if I request them on my authority as a feudal lord.

"I think that will work. If we add those three, it won't be an issue."

Albeit minors, all three are magicians, and it's a guard duty in an underground ruin without any dangers at all.

If I were to ask other nobles I might be told that it's a luxury, or way too excessive.

"I guess I'll try asking the three..."

It'll be fine to do so in the afternoon when the prep school's lessons have ended, and if I add some extra part-time pay, I don't think that it'll be an issue for them.

Given that it won't be much of a work in the first place, it might please them as a good part-time job with a decent pay.



"Bodyguarding sensei in an underground ruin? I will take you up on that."

"Sensei, I will also do my best."

"I wonder what kind of underground ruin it's going to be."

Since the three gladly accepted the job when I sounded them out about it right away, we would head out to the underground ruin investigation, accompanied by Arnest.

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"I see...I guess that means it has a highly scholarly value."

"Oo——h! This is more than I had expected."

In the afternoon of the next day we dive into the underground ruin that has been discovered at the edge of Baulburg.

Two guard members have been keeping watch at the entrance. According to them, they are guarding this place in a shift system to prevent ruin looting.

Once we enter the ruin, the ceiling and walls are blanketed with three-dimensional, carved dragons. The ruin has a temple-like structure with many dragon stone statues of various shapes spread out. All statues seem to be made out of marble, and the engraved dragons are overflowing with impressions of being alive.

Arnest, who sees that, runs around all over the place and frantically takes notes while being in a very happy mood.

I'm deeply moved at first as well, but...if you look at such things for thirty minutes, you'd get bored of it, right?

"Sensei, is this underground ruin a temple?"

Agnes asks as she looks at the ruin together with me.

"I wonder? There could have really been an ancient religion worshiping dragons a long time ago."

"Such a religion really existed, but it is unrelated to this underground ruin." (Arnest)

Arnest answers Agnes' question in my stead.

"That's a bold declaration."

Making such a bold declaration must mean that he's quite confident in his own theory.

"The carved dragons in this place are magnificent, but they have a completely different design from the ones I encountered in religious facilities revering dragons during past excavations. I think they only have the objective to serve as ornaments."

"I see."

Decorating almost all of a two-storied basement with dragons, eh...? Just why was this underground ruin actually built then?

"That is something I plan to investigate scientifically in the future. By the way, where did Erwin go?"

"Huh? Now that you mention it..."

Even when I look around me, I can't find Erw anywhere, so I try asking Agnes who has been looking at a dragon carved into a huge stone pillar.

"If it's Erwin-sama, it seems he has gone to the toilet."

"He should have said something first, damn it...!"

It's not like we can urinate in this ruin, but fortunately it's close to the city. Given that it doesn't appear dangerous around here, he's apparently gone outside to borrow a toilet.

"Well, whatever. Arnest, are you about done?"

"Yes."

Because today is a preliminary examination for a full scientific investigation, it appears that Arnest has nothing left to do here after around one hour. Once I inform him about going back soon, he agrees without any complaints for a change.

"Agnes, Cindy, Betty, we're going home."

"Already?"

"I feel bad about getting paid for only this much."

"It's only been one hour so far."

Agnes' group ends up feeling guilty about receiving a bigger pay than usual for such a simple job.

"It has ended faster than expected, but you three have properly performed the duties assigned to you. Don't worry about it."

"But, we've just been looking at the underground ruin."

"Protecting me that nothing happens to me is your job. And in fact, nothing has happened to me. All that's left is to return to the surface. It's not necessary to worry about it since you have succeeded at your job."

Agnes is a diligent girl as expected, isn't she?
She feels that it's wrong to get paid for such a simple job.

"That's how it is, so let's go back."

"Sensei, what's that?"

Immediately after I give the order to withdraw, Cindy has apparently spotted something. Once I look in the direction she's pointing to check what it might be, I see a single rat over there. I think that's the first living being I see in this ruin since entering.

"A rat...?"

"Sensei, considering that it's a simple rat..."

"Huh? This is..."

Once I look once more closely since Betty has pointed it out, I notice that it's not a living rat. It has ingeniously camouflaged itself by properly growing out fur, but on a close look, I can see that its skin has a metallic sheen...

"It is an artificial product. Moreover, it is quite old."

Arnest declares that the rat is man-made.

"It is a valuable, scientific specimen. You can also use it for researching its magic technology."

After all it's an artificial rat with a size identical to a real rat. That means we can expect a development in magic technology if we research this after catching it.

"I will catch it then, okay?"

Understanding that, Cindy defenselessly approaches the rat to capture it. She probably thinks that it's not that dangerous since it's an artificial rat. However, that's a careless thinking for an adventurer, and moreover a dangerous conduct. I try to stop her in a hurry.

"Cindy! Don't approach it carelesslyyy..."

"Eh?"

In the instant when Cindy looks back due to my yell, I sense as if some kind of magic is shot out of the artificial rat's mouth.

Until now I couldn't sense any mana from the rat. Just what kind of trick is that...? No, right now is not the time to worry about that.

At this rate the magic will directly hit Cindy.

As a 『Magic Barrier』 won't be in time either, I unconsciously thrust Cindy away to the side, receiving the rat's magic with my own body.

Since it's no magic I can see with my eyes, it shouldn't cause any direct damage.

Still, I think Erw might have gotten angry if he had been here.



"...? Huh? Nothing in particular has changed?"

I was hit by the rat's magic, but I don't particularly feel any pain or whatsoever. However, somehow I feel like my line of sight has become awfully low...

"Cindy, you okay?"

"Yes... But, sensei, you are!"

"Me? ... Oh? I feel like you have suddenly grown, Cindy."

After all, I'm currently looking up to Cindy's face. Just what the heck is going on here?

"Sensei! You can't call that nothing!"

"How is your body's condition?"

Worrying about me, Agnes and Betty run up to me as well, but I feel like both of them have become quite big.

"Earl Baumeister, you need to take a straight look at reality. It is not that the three of them have become bigger. Try taking a look in a mirror."



ヴェンデリン (五歳)

「ああ、わかったよ」

「俺は魔法の袋から手鏡を取り出して自分の顔を見てみた。というか、魔法の袋も、他の装飾品も、ローブすら随分と大きく変わったような。ローブに至っては、完全にブカブカではないか。そして、手鏡に映った俺の顔も……。」

「まるで子供だな」

「パウライスター伯爵、いい加減、現実逃避をやめるのであるな」

I take a hand-mirror out of my magic bag, and look at my own face.
Or rather, somehow I feel like the magic bag, the other decorations, and even my robe have become fairly big...

Speaking of the robe, isn't it way too baggy?
And even my face as it's reflected in the mirror is...

"I totally look like a child, don't I?" (Format Blue)

I recall the time when I had just been reincarnated into this world.

"Earl Baumeister, will you stop escaping reality already?" (Arnest)

"Yeah, I got it." (Format Blue)

In fact I had mostly noticed it after I got hit by the rat's mysterious spell.
However, so far I've never heard of a spell like this, leaving me with a feeling that it couldn't be true. Still, seeing my own body having actually become small like this is, you know...

"Your robe and clothes are too baggy, so it's probably hard to move in them?"

"There's that as well, but I wonder what Elise and the other are going to say after they see that I've become so small all of a sudden?"

Even though they are soon going to give birth, I don't qualify as a father like this, but rather as a big brother?

"That is what you call escaping from reality." (Arnest)

That damn Arnest...poking his nose into the business of other people...

"Sensei, I'm terribly sorry...but, you're cute."

"Sensei, while we've been with you...how adorable."

"Sensei, are you alright? You're really cute."

And then I end up getting surrounded by Agnes and the other two while being told that I'm cute.

"Little ladies, you have fairly nice characters." (Arnest)

For some reason I've become a child after being hit by the rat's magic.



"I am going to chase after the rat." (Arnest)

"Why?"

"Going by my estimation, the rat who has turned you into a child, is a cutting-edge magic tool of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era. It is an artificial rat using special magic that will change an adult into a child. I suppose that dispelling this spell is connected to the rat's destruction."

As I'm bewildered in my current state, Arnest suggests something outrageous. It looks like the rat, who has cast the spell, must be destroyed for me to return to normal.

"Won't the spell run out at some point?"

"That might normally be the case, but the artificial rat has continued its activity for a very long time while hiding down here. That means, it would be smarter to also consider the possibility for Earl Baumeister to remain a child. As long as the rat remains active by replenishing its magic through some kind of method, it is correct to assess that the spell will keep running." (Arnest)

Arnest explains his view when asked by Agnes.

"In other words, the rat mustn't get away?"

"Correct. If it remains hidden somewhere, Earl Baumeister will remain a child until his death."

That shitty demon says this as if he's talking about today's weather.

"Victory goes to the one who makes the first move! 『Flame Arrow』!"

In that case matters are simple. I shoot a fire arrow at the rat that's several meters ahead of me. It's impossible for me to miss at this range...

"No way!"

My 『Flame Arrow』 doesn't seem to carry the firepower it should upon impact. Even after directly hitting the rat, it didn't have an effect at all.

"Chu."

"It's totally making fun of me there."

Betraying its appearance, the artificial rat seems to be made quite sturdily. I couldn't destroy it with my spell just now.



"Earl Baumeister, artificial rats do not make fun of others. It is your imagination." (Arnest)

"..."

Don't tell me what I already know!
It's just a figure of speech!
Either way, for my magic's power to have fallen this far...

"At the same time as your body has reverted to that of a child, your mana has also reverted to what it was at that age." (Arnest)

In short, I have around as much power as back when I started to learn magic, I suppose.
Estimating it from the 『Flame Arrow』, my actual power has completely deteriorated to an elementary level.

"That rat is storing mana. It will not be destroyed by something at the level of your current magic, Earl Baumeister." (Arnest)

"Don't say it so calmly!"

"What a mess! In that case, I will handle it!"

"Me too!"

"It's a waste since you're so cute, but...no, that's not it! You damn rat!"

Learning that I wouldn't be able to destroy the rat in my current state, Agnes and the other two try to shoot their own spells at the rat.
However, before they can, the rat hides behind a stone pillar with dragon carvings.

"Waaaiitt——!"

"It's pointless to hide!"

"I'm gonna break you!"

Agnes' group quickly goes around the stone pillar, but they immediately return while not knowing what to do next.

"What's wrong, all of you?"

"The rat has escaped into a hole."

"What did you say!?"

I also confirm it in a hurry, but there's a hole big enough for a rat to pass through at the base of the pillar.
It looks like the hole is connected to the underground.

"Hm——m, this is..."

"What's with the 『Hm——m』, Arnest?"

"It seems like this underground ruin is extending even further down."

"Did the guys, who investigated it before, sleep or something?"

Once you follow the hole at the base of the pillar, a new space extends at a lower floor...
...Isn't kinda odd for them to not have noticed this?

"If you look at the hole, you will see that it is new. When all is said and done, I suspect the rat, which had lived further down, dug a hole and came out to check since it got noisy above its living place due to the previous investigation." (Arnest)

I see. I guess that means the rat started to become active due to the sounds of the previous investigations, and it just encountered us when we came to this place today.
I feel sorry and reflect in my heart for having doubted my retainers who investigated this place before.

"Anyway, I guess we should join up with Erw first..."

If we don't destroy the rat after joining up with Erw, who's gone to the toilet, and searching for a path connecting to the place below, I will remain a child...

"Oohh! You will occasionally find them in the demon country as well, demons preferring to run around naked." (Arnest)

"As if that's the case here!"

Since my clothes have become too big after I suddenly became small, it just slid off now that I started to run around.
Only the robe has barely remained on my shoulders, but it's quite heavy for a child's body...
My mana has decreased, and I'm stark naked...can it actually get any worse?

"Anyway, we have to destroy the rat as fast as possible." (Arnest)

"How about capturing this underground ruin with the whole force of the Earl Baumeister House?"

At this rate it might be dangerous to head deeper down into the underground ruin with our current lineup.
It's a bitter choice, but we'll retreat from here for the moment...just when I thought that...

"There's a further continuation of this underground ruin beneath this hole...we must destroy the rat as fast as possible."

"If you remain a child...we'll get scolded by our classmates, sensei."

"For the sake of catching that rat quickly...I'll widen this hole with magic!"

Seemingly believing that they had to save me, Agnes' group is about to widen the hole used as an escape route by the rat with magic.

That's quite hasty of them...they must be quite flustered.

Since it's a ruin with such a rat around, there's no doubt that we can expect other things outside our expectations, such as traps, awaiting us down there.

I try to stop the three, but...before that I notice how the eyes of the dragon carved onto the pillar light up.

"Arnest!"

"The carved dragon is reacting to the raising mana of the little ladies."

"So, what's going to happen?"

"I do not know the answer to that either."

However, the reply shows itself right away.

A magic crest, which I've kinda seen before, surfaces beneath our feet.

At the same time, I can't move my feet as if they've been glued to the ground.

"There was something like a magic crest here?"

"My guess is that the eyes of that dragon serve as something similar to a projector casting the magic crest. Sucking up the ladies' mana, it transcribes the crest beneath the feet of its target. This underground ruin is a winner." (Arnest)

"Is this the time to be happy about it!?"

I feel a deja vu from the magic crest surfacing at my feet.

It is resembling the 『Deadly Inversion Regulation』 we experienced back during our adventurer debut battle.

Since that was also a legacy of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era, it's very likely that we'll be flung somewhere just as it happened back then.

Moreover in a worrisome state of lacking combat power with me being a child, Erw being absent, Arnest being the wrong man for this, and Agnes' group being inexperienced.

""Sensei!""

"Now that it has reached this situation, nothing can be done about it anymore. You three, make sure to stay calm."

The instant I thought that this was the wrong way to give advice, the magic crest at my feet got even brighter, and I lost consciousness, being plunged into a deep darkness.

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"Ugh...so I was transported to some place, as expected..."

"Sensei, are you okay?"

As I open my eyes after having been sent somewhere by the mysterious magic crest, I meet Agnes' face right in front of my nose.

It seems she's been looking after me after I fainted by giving me a lap pillow.

Because my body has reverted to that of a child with a low magic resistance, it has apparently needed time to recover. It looks like everyone has waited for me to wake up.

"Oohh, it seems like you have woken up." (Arnest)

"Sensei, can you move?"

"Somehow...huh?"

I try to stand up as is, but I get dizzy and fall back onto Agnes' lap.

Unfortunately it appears that I've currently only got the stamina of the five-years-old me immediately after reincarnating into this world.

Just having mana is already a gain.

With my mana capacity being at elementary level, I won't be much of a combat power, which means I'll need to rely on Arnest and Agnes.

It's unknown what's awaiting us ahead of this point, but a magician-only party is way too lopsided. Erw not being here is a real bummer.

"Sensei, you have to rest for a bit longer."

"It's unfortunate, but it looks like my current state is as you can see."

Anyway, right now I must recover the stamina I lost through the transfer.

I'm having Agnes giving me a lap pillow, but I don't have the leeway to get embarrassed about it. There's no one else besides us here anyway...

"I want to investigate this underground ruin as soon as we return." (Arnest)

"Say that after we manage to get back."

After all, the possibility of investigating this ruin depends on whether we can safely return to the surface in the first place.

"Agnes-chan, let me take over."

"Please do. I'm going to explore our surroundings a bit."

"Agnes, don't go too far. Make sure to search with 『Detect』."

"Okay, I got it."

Given that they don't have the time to just bother with me, the one with the biggest mana among

them, Agnes — leaving Arnest out of the quotation here — has Betty take over in giving me a lap pillow, and immediately begins to investigate the vicinity with 『Detect』.

"There are no responses typical of monsters around us."

As I thought, I guess we won't know any details unless we actually move further in after I recover.

"Sensei, is the area beneath your head not too hard?"

"It's okay, I'd say."

Agnes' thighs were quite soft.

Seeing how she's the top student in the classroom, she probably spends a lot more time studying at home than getting physical exercise.

The thighs of Betty, who hunts often, are tighter than those of Agnes, but smooth.

I wonder how Cindy's thighs feel...bah! Am I some perverted old dude!?

Right now's not the time to check out stuff like that!

"Sensei, sorry. Because I carelessly approached the rat..."

Cindy feels depressed over being the one at fault for us being stuck in such a situation.

"Cindy, with the circumstances being what they are, worrying about things that already happened won't change anything. For now we should only think about how to safely get out of here. That is something important for adventurers."

"Okay!"

As I stroke her head while saying this, Cindy finally recovers her usual cheerfulness.

After all it'll become a big impediment for our escape from this place if she loses heart.



"The dizziness is gone at long last."

"Sensei, laying down for a bit longer is..."

"Betty, I thank you for worrying about me, but there's no guarantee that we will be safe here forever. I'm already fine."

"Sensei, please tell us right away if you get tired, okay?"

"That's a matter of course. After all, I have this body..."

For the sake of getting back to the surface, we start scouting out the vicinity first.

Since nothing has attacked us while I was taking a rest, it means this area is safe for now.

"Earl Baumeister, it would be better if you were to change your clothes." (Arnest)

"You're right."

The clothes I've been wearing are baggy, and the robe is too long and heavy, resulting in me dragging it along the ground as I walk. Accordingly I quickly put away my clothes and the robe into my magic bag, and take out the clothes I wore during my childhood.

"Those have lasted quite long." (Arnest)

"I just had forgotten to throw them away."

It proves to be lucky that I have a poor man's mentality of thinking that I might use them for something someday, and that I'm sloppy as in finding it a pain to throw them away. They're slightly worn-down, but it's not like I can't wear them. While at it, I also take out and equip the lightest short wand, given that I can't use anything higher than elementary magic at the moment. This should up the fire power of my magic a bit.

"Good grief...what an outrageous disaster...eh? Why are your faces so red?"

I notice the girls looking my way with blushing faces.

"Sensei, please tell us before you change your clothes."

"I'm sorry, but we're in a state of an emergency right now."

I don't want to waste a single second, and my body is currently the same as that of a child. I tell Agnes that it doesn't matter that they've seen my naked body.

"Sensei, it's also an issue of tact."

If it's a party of men and women after they've become adventurers, it's not like they won't ever see the naked body of the opposite sex by accident. Such times are the wrong occasions to be oddly conscious of it, not to mention getting aroused. It'll be a problem if it'll cause an influence on the party's teamwork. I explain to Agnes and the other two girls that they should quickly get ready to move without minding it.

"Understood. We won't look at the small sensei."

"Now listen...it's because I'm a child right now."

That damn Betty. Taking her attitude towards her big brother into account, I wonder whether she isn't actually an S.



"...Considering that it's a corridor, it sure is spacious. I can't see all the way inside..."

"The width and height is around ten meters. It is extending quite far ahead." (Arnest)

Once I have finished changing clothes, we quickly start moving from the place where we had been transferred to.

We continue proceeding through the corridor, or rather the cave looking like it had been merely drilled through the rock, while relying on magic lamps.

"My pace is..."

Since I've become a child, my steps are small and thus my walking speed is slow, so I'm troubled. Agnes and the others have dropped their pace to match me, and since I get tired quickly, we have to often take breaks.

Being unable to do what I had been normally capable of until now is truly tough.

"Sensei, you okay?"

"Want to join hands with me?"

"It might be better for me to carry you."

"Agnes, make sure to only concentrate on the front. Cindy, if we hold hands, one of your hands will be blocked, which will be no good. The same for you, Betty. If you carry me as rear guard, won't I be in danger instead?"

Currently, Agnes is walking in front watching for any dangers, Cindy is protecting Arnest and me in the middle, and Betty is cautious of our back, but since all three of them are only paying attention to me, I give them a light scolding.

"Proceed in the formation we have decided on in advance. There are times where you will be attacked by monsters or fall into traps when you act on your own accord."

I caution them strongly since it's a matter of life and death right now.

"Even if you warn them with such a body, it lacks persuasiveness." (Arnest)

"It's none of your business!"

I loudly retort at Arnest who makes a witty remark.

Going by amount of mana, this guy should be our strongest combat force, but he's really difficult to use.

"You're also cute when angry, sensei."

"..."

Of all things I end up being called cute even by Agnes who I had considered the final bastion of rationality. It proves that Arnest has spoken the truth, but I don't want to admit that at any cost.

"So, is this going away at some point?"

"That is impossible seeing how the rat has not been destroyed. That rat is a guard to prevent intrusion into the ruin by casting a spell to turn the invaders into children." (Arnest)

Because the invaders will weaken in mana and strength if they are turned into children, it'll become easy to repel them.

"There is nothing here that would be of scientific value." (Arnest)

Arnest seems to be disconcerted with this underground ruin where he can't see anything but rock face as we advance.

He hasn't been looking as joyful as usual.

"Nothing but corridors, caves, and spaces. That will not be able to stir my imagination." (Arnest)

"It's truly nothing but a cave. Still, I wonder how long that will continue to be so?"

"As invaders are sent here through a magic crest, it is a space with some kind of purpose." (Arnest)

It won't be anything good anyway. I've understood that much at the 『Deadly Inversion Regulation』.

"For a magic crest to be projected by the eyes of a dragon carved into a stone pillar, that was unexpected for me as well. Since we also discovered the rat that came from underground to check the situation as a result of us being noisy above this underground ruin, it can be called a lucky break." (Arnest)

"You have it nice, being so carefree, don't you?"

I guess you can also describe it as his nature as a scholar.

Thinking that we could immediately chase after the rat if we widened the hole beneath the stone pillar was a mistake.

To think that there would be a trap that'd send us down here through a transfer crest with the mana, when the three girls tried to use magic, serving as a trigger...

We had been totally unprepared.

Elise or Lisa likely wouldn't have carelessly used magic at that place.

"Because we were transferred, it's also become difficult to return through 『Teleport』."

"It should not be that far away from the basement beneath Baulburg's suburbs, but I think it will at least be a distance that can obstruct 『Teleport』." (Arnest)

Even if not, it's impossible for me to use 『Teleport』 with my current amount of mana.

In addition, there's many other spells I can't use because of lacking mana.

Right now I'm no more than a burden.

"Sensei, it's exiting towards a space that looks like a room."

After walking for around ten minutes, we come out in a room, or rather a space that's spreading out a bit.

Just when I wondered whether this corridor would end in a dead end here, there's a pedestal made out of stone in the middle of the room. A dragon statue with an overall-length of three meters has been placed on top of it.

On a closer look, it seems like there's an ascending stairway behind it.

"That means we will be able to go up a floor if we climb those stairs." (Arnest)

"It's a well-made dragon statue."

"It's an object from the Ancient Magic Civilization's era."

"What are you so carefree for..."

Even if I might be in the body of a child, it's obvious to me.

Or rather, leaving the beginner Cindy aside, Arnest must have noticed it long ago.

I instantly shift into my combat mode.

"You three, get your 『Magic Barrier』 ready."

I order Agnes' group to immediately enter into their combat stances.

Arnest...I can't believe that this guy will move upon my orders. Besides he possesses more mana than me.

Even if his initial response will be slightly delayed, he probably won't die that easily.

"Eh? What's wrong?"

"I mean, that dragon statue is..."

"Then it must be a man-made object..."

"No, that's our enemy."

"Earl Baumeister, look closely above the head of that dragon ornament." (Arnest)

"Picking a fight with me, eh...?"

The artificial rat, who has transformed me into a child, has taken up position on top of the dragon's head.

I wonder, should I interpret this as the rat manipulating the artificial dragon?

"All things considered, 『Detect』 doesn't work on that rat."

"It has been built in such a way. It is a highly-efficient structure allowing the usage of special magic by miniaturizing it to the extreme. Earl Baumeister, I would like you to defeat it as undamaged as

possible." (Arnest)

"I can't really promise you that."

After all, I'm not of much use in combat right now, so I have to make Agnes' group fight as the main force.

"You got to do your best then, Arnest."

"My magic attribute is 『Darkness』. It is a magic focused on manipulating the minds of people, demons, and living beings. In other words, it will not work against these artificial creatures. What I can do is to protect you, Earl Baumeister." (Arnest)

With those words Arnest deploys a firm 『Magic Barrier』, sheltering me within. It looks like he has acknowledged my value as sponsor for the sake of his underground ruin excavations.

"That thing is what you'd call a dragon golem."

"Do your best, little ladies." (Arnest)

"Agnes, Cindy, Betty, it's not an enemy you can't win against with the mana of you three. Calm down, and fight while remembering our lessons."

""Yes, sensei!""

I make Agnes' group calm down with that speech, and immediately after the three confront the dragon golem, it roars, and we're plunged into battle.



"Remember our lessons...let's go, Cindy, Betty!" (Agnes)

The three begin to fight the small dragon golem with the oldest, Agnes, acting as leader. Going by amount of mana, age, and personality, I believe that it's the most sensible decision for Agnes to be the leader.

"Betty! Cast the 『Magic Barriers』!"

"Sure thing!"

First Agnes entrusts Betty, who's good at using 『Magic Barrier』, with the defense which you can't miss in battles against dragons. Thanks to the 『Magic Barriers』 deployed with appropriate strength and timing by her, the dragon golem's breath attacks are blocked with ease.

"I guess the timing and intensity of her 『Magic Barriers』 gets a passing mark..."

"Earl Baumeister, that is quite the strict assessment." (Arnest)

"Well, their lives are on the line here. Besides, I'm a sensei."

"With that appearance?"

"Don't say it!"

It's not like I've become a child because I like it.

The battle between Agnes' group and the dragon golem currently seems even with both apparently sounding each other out.

Since it's not a practical lesson, I have to help out in the worst case, but with my offensive abilities right now...

I don't know whether I'll be of much use, but I need to get ready to reinforce them at any time.

"It will not work out like with the bone dragon subjugation you mentioned previously, Earl Baumeister."

"It'll be a joint effort. Agnes' party is holding out well."

In the first place, me being forced to fight such a monster as a 10-years old, and moreover by myself, was abnormal. Agnes' group is handling it quite well considering their lacking experience. If it were other students of my class, Arnest and I might have already been dead by now.

"In other words, being partial is not only bad either." (Arnest)

"Don't call it being partial!"

I'm just keeping an eye on excellent students, okay!?

He sure keeps saying whatever he wants, and yet he's totally useless with his huge amount of mana!

"Anyway, I'll back them up. Remove the 『Magic Barriers』 once I give you the signal."

"Roger." (Arnest)

I take the handmade bow which I used long ago out of my magic bag.

It's rather questionable whether I'll be even able to cause a single scratch on the dragon golem with it, but the objective isn't to cause damage.

I remove the arrowhead of the short arrow used by children, install a reasonably big magic stone instead, and after nocking the arrow, I aim at the dragon golem who's repeating a hit and away offensive against Agnes and the others.

"What do you plan to do with that?"

"It's gonna be a distraction."

Even if the rat and the dragon golem are man-made, it should interfere with their visual perceptions, seeing as they got artificial eyes.

The magic stone at the arrow's end will be used for casting 『Flash』 in front of the dragon golem's eyes.

"Even without you going out of your way to add a magic stone to the arrow, it will work as long as you use your magic, Earl Baumeister."

"It has another aim as well. Arnest, Agnes, Betty, Cindy, close your eyes!"

Upon my signal, Arnest lowers the 『Magic Barrier』 temporarily, Agnes' group strengthens their 『Magic Barriers』, and all of them close their eyes.

Immediately following, my arrow flies all the way to the tip of the dragon golem's nose, and before hitting its head, the installed magic stone casts a light that only dazzles.

Unable to use anything but elementary magic at the moment, there's a limit to my power, even if I use it as dazzler with 『Flash』.

Not to mention that the opponents are artificial. The effect should be fairly limited.

Accordingly, I also make the magic stone at the arrow's tip burn, causing a fierce 『Flash』 to burst forth in front of the dragon golem's eyes.

If they have such an intense flash light up right in front of them, it ought to scorch the lens parts of the golem and rat's eyes.

"A plan to limit their visual perception, huh?"

"Correct."

They'll quickly recover from the dazzling, but if the structure of their artificial eyes has been scorched, their visual input will be limited until it gets repaired.

"Agnes! A part of the rat and dragon's eyes should have been burned. Use the blind spot created by that!"

"Okay!"

I think the battle ought to become a bit more advantageous for Agnes' party's side with this.

While I'm thinking this, Agnes' team completely switches to offense.

Entrusting the control of the 『Magic Barriers』 and their defense deployment to Betty, Agnes fires a follow-up 『Fireball』 at the dragon golem, and Cindy follows suit with a 『Earth Lance』.

"I guess their firepower is sufficient."

Since they've fired spells, which were concentrated to the limit for the sake of economizing on the mana, their spells should deliver decent damage if they hit.

However, this dragon golem is quick.

It skilfully dodges the spells of the two.

"I suppose their mobility goes up in proportion to their decreased size...Agnes, don't fire the magic in a straight line! Why do you think I reduced its visual field?"

Even though I went out of my way to scorch their eyes with 『Flash』, spells that are simply shot from the front will be dealt with by the rat and the dragon golem.

The other side has its visual perception only impaired partially, it's not like they can't see anything at all.

"Cindy! From the right side!"

"Okay!"

Once I instruct her, the focused 『Flame Arrow』 shot by Cindy draws a big curve, trying to penetrate the golem's wing from the right. However, the dragon golem flicks it away with its tail before it can land.

"Sensei, it was no good."

"It's not like it failed completely."

As I thought, the 『Flash』 seems to have damaged a part of its visual perception. It was late to react against Cindy's spell, and only barely repelled it after getting instructed by the rat. Looking closely, a part of the golem's tail has melted due to the arrow's heat. Even though it would have usually dodged this, it probably had no choice but to repel the arrow with its tail because of its narrowed visual field.

"Agnes, from the left now!"

"Yes!"

Next, Agnes aims a 『Wind Cutter』 at the dragon golem from the left side. Her spell hits the wing, and tears off the wing's tip.

"All of you, did you understand?"

""""Yes!""""

Due to the series of instructions just now, it's become clear that the golem's visual field on the left side has worsened quite a bit. Accumulating damage by abusing that fact is the ideal move. Agnes and the other two have comprehended that as well.

"These kinds of products of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era are certainly powerful, but if you damage them once, it's easier to chip away their combat power afterwards. They can't heal themselves with healing magic or potions after all."

There are some that possess a mechanism of automatically repairing themselves in front of your eyes, but you just have to make sure that they can't get away with it.

"Ey!"

Cindy shoots yet another 『Flame Arrow』 from the dragon golem's left side. This one also hits, leaving a big hole in the golem's left wing behind.

Apparently judging that it'd be bad to allow them to attack any further, the dragon golem launches a counterattack, capitalizing on its small body.

Without clashing against the walls or ceiling of the cave that can't be called spacious by any standards, it spits its breath attacks at Agnes' group while flying around at a super-low altitude.

However, this is also blocked by Betty who focuses on the 『Magic Barriers』.

As if giving tit-for-tat, Agnes fires a focused 『Flame Arrow』 at the golem from the left side.

This one hits as well. The golem probably hated having its wings shot any further. By sacrificing half of its tail, it prevents the loss of its wing.

"The combination of the dragon golem's magnificent artificial intelligence with the rat's artificial intelligence is splendid."

"On whose side are you!?"

Even though he'd die if we actually lost...this is the reason why he's called scholar.

"It is dusty."

"So you say, but what's the point in whining about it, seeing as it can't be helped anyway..."

Arnest complains while brushing away the big amount of dust, which has been whirled up due to the dragon golem's high-speed maneuvers.

As if he's got anything to complain about dust when he's usually doing excavations anyway.

He's a guy where I don't quite get whether he's whimsical because he's a demon, or whether he's moody because he's a scholar.

"Uh-oh."

Just as I think so, he swiftly deploys his 『Magic Barrier』, blocking a stray breath shot that had been aimed at Agnes' group.

"I am useful." (Arnest)

"No doubt."

As expected, Agnes' group has their hands full, dealing with their own circumstances right now.

"It won't hit!"

"Agnes, we'll corner it in the cave with two spells!"

"Oki, let's match our timings!"

Still, although they seem to come up with their own plans, the golem easily dodges their two spells even after being cornered in a corner of the cave, and adds a return attack on top of it.

"Agnes-chan! Cindy-chan! Hurry!"

Betty, who's deploying her 『Magic Barriers』 while dealing with the golem's attacks, starts to get

flustered as her mana relentlessly keeps dwindling away.

"Even though she just needs to replenish her mana with spare magic gems."

"She cannot handle that much." (Arnest)

Betty must timely deploy her 『Magic Barriers』.

Because she can't take her eyes off the situation for even a second, she can't grasp a good timing to replenish her mana with the magic gems she possesses as a side effect of her lacking combat experience.

Since it's a common mistake among beginners, it's not really all that unusual.

Burkhart-san previously said that magicians end up dead because of that, although only rarely.

"Arnest, we're heading out."

"As support for the young ladies?"

"Yes, right."

If Agnes' group loses to the dragon golem, I, who have become a childish elementary magician, and Arnest, who can't damage the golem with his magic, are going to die.

I think it'll take a bad end if we don't lend them a hand at this point.

"Betty, excuse us for a bit."

"Sensei?"

Arnest and I aim for a moment when Betty hasn't deployed a barrier, and call out to her from behind.

"Since Arnest is going to cast 『Magic Barriers』 as needed as your replacement, take out a magic gem while you can, and recover your mana with it."

"Got it. Sorry, I got panicked worrying what would happen if I was late on using my 『Magic Barriers』 because I had taken my eyes off to check my magic bag..."

It'd be something else if it was only about her, but it'd also concern the lives of Agnes and Cindy. It's understandable that Betty, who lacks combat experience, has lost her nerves.

"Since you will have enough time to gradually learn those things, it's fine for you to concentrate on what you can do right now. That's why I'm here as your sensei."

"Thank you, sensei."

"Just so you know, it is actually me who is deploying the 『Magic Barriers』. With Earl Baumeister's current 『Magic Barrier』..."

"Shut it, we know without you spelling it out."

This demon really sucks at reading the mood.
At such times you should just cast your 『Magic Barriers』 and keep your trap shut!

"I missed again!"

"Uug——gh, I'm not hitting it..."

If it comes to the amount of mana, the two are still capable of fighting without any problems, but as they're unfamiliar with actual combat, they've lost their composure.
At this rate, they'll gradually run out of mana, and lose.

"Arnest, we're heading out even further to the front."

"Good grief, you sure are working your personnel hard."

"I don't mind if you want to die?"

If he says that demons don't die, I'm definitely going to leave him behind.

"I know, I know, I was just joking."

Betty is already fine after having replenished her mana.
Next I'll calm down Agnes and Cindy, who're fighting in front of her, and give them a chance to replenish their mana.
Taking back control here for a moment should raise our chance of winning.

"Agnes, Cindy, you okay?"

"Yes."

"I'm fine."

"Replenish your mana while you can. Take a deep breath and calm down."

While I have Arnest block the golem's attacks, I tell the two to settle down for a bit.
At such times, things get worse the more you panic.

"Sensei, I have recovered my mana."

"Sensei, me too."

It looks like both have settled down.

"On the other hand, it is terrible for me!" (Arnest)

"Endure your role as a shield!"

After all he got more mana than me.
Seeing how he can't attack, I have Arnest devote his efforts towards serving as a shield for

everyone's survival.

"Agnes, Cindy, do you have an idea about that dragon golem's weakpoint?"

"Does it have something like a weakpoint?"

"Real combat is about fighting while discovering that."

You won't know whether an enemy really has any weakpoints unless you actually challenge them to a fight.

However, I'd like Agnes' group to realize that keeping to think about it while fighting, and flexibly changing the tactics at times is also very important.

"I'm sorry. You did your best to create a blind spot, and yet..."

The previous 『Flash』, eh?

The reason why Agnes has apologized to me is probably because their spells gradually stopped hitting from the left side as time passed on.

However, I had expected as much.

"That's inevitable. The battle situation has already advanced, and the opponents adopted countermeasures against it."

The artificial dragon golem can't recover through healing magic or potions.

It still has a malfunction in its left eye thanks to the previous 『Flash』. That much is true.

However, that rat is sitting on top of the golem's head.

I can't think that both artificial beings are speaking with each other through words, but they are likely dealing with the attacks from the left side, which has become a blind spot, through some kind of method we aren't aware of.

"The other side has been built so that they wouldn't be destroyed. In short, they have countermeasures in place to avoid that fate, I'm sure."

I mean, they are legacies of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era.

It's not just for show that they're still operating up until today.

"Agnes, Cindy, did you think of a weakpoint?"

"Umm..."

It's probably plenty that they can fight up to this point in a battle against a dragon golem they've encountered today for the first time, but if possible, I'd like them to realize the dragon golem's weakpoint.

For the time being, the dragon golem has compensated for its malfunctioning sight by linking with the rat, but that doesn't mean that this weakpoint is gone.

Sure, by sharing information with the rat, it has temporarily alleviated that flaw, but it's not like the damage to its eyes has been fixed with that, neither does it mean that the rat has taken absolutely no damage from the 『Flash』.

"Agnes, that dragon golem does have a weakpoint. You know what it is?"

"Eh? A weakpoint?"

"If you think about it a bit, even a child would understand. You just can't hit upon it because you're agitated by your first real combat. Try considering it calmly."

"Okay..."

Agnes continues to brood over it for a while, but then she finally notices the solution, it seems.

"Sensei! I found its weakpoint! Here I go! Everyone, close your eyes!"

After Agnes tells everyone to close their eyes, she fires a 『Flash』 light sphere towards the golem's right eye...just when everyone thinks that, she lets the sphere explode right in front of the rat's eyes. I closed my eyes as well, but I could sense it through the movements of the mana.

"Chuu——!"

Until now, the artificial rat had only cried in a way that could only be taken as it looking down on humans, but what can be heard now is a voice that completely sounds like a scream. Since it's not alive, it shouldn't feel the dazzle, but it might be the replacement for a warning towards the occurrence of a malfunction in its own visual perception.

"Chuu——!"

"Ah! Wait!"

"No, don't mind it."

Seemingly upon the rat's order, the dragon golem descends towards the pedestal it had sat on in the beginning, in order to replenish its mana.

I say to Agnes, who tries to stop it, "Don't focus too much on damaging the dragon golem's main body. Cindy, you've got it as well?"

"Yes! Here I coooooome!"

It looks like she has understood my aim.

Cindy destroys the clasp-like parts atop the pedestal with pellets that had their speed and accuracy increased.

Right, if you destroy that part, the golem won't be able to replenish its mana, even if it lands there. If you can't bring the dragon golem down with one blow, destroying the pedestal's function to resupply mana is much easier to carry out than breaking the dragon golem's main body.

"Sensei, we did it."

"Don't drop your guard."

We have blocked the mana supply on top of reducing the visual perception of the dragon golem and the rat navigating it, which will make it impossible to repair the broken parts in the end. They have definitely been cornered, but because the golem itself still got its combat abilities left, we can't show any negligence.

However, under these circumstances, that golem should definitely move as I expect it to.

"Everyone, make sure to focus on defense, and gather in one place."

Immediately after all five of us have assembled in one spot upon my signal, the cornered dragon starts to unleash a chain of powerful attacks at us without thinking of the consequences.

It probably wants to kill us before running out of power.

We're intruders in this underground ruin. If it manages to kill us here, it'll be equal to having prevented the ruin from being invaded.

"It has an amazing fire power."

Arnest has a completely astonished look due to the chain of attacks by the dragon golem.

"Sensei, is it fine for us to not make any move?"

"Yeah, but be ready to launch a simultaneous attack at any time."

Arnest can't contribute anything besides 『Magic Barriers』 in this underground ruin anyway. Hence it's the most efficient method to weather through the final stretch of attacks by the golem.

"You handle your personnel roughly." (Arnest)

"This place is an underground ruin, isn't it? Show some motivation, will you?"

"I guess it can not be helped." (Arnest)

Arnest seems calm despite his complaints.

He continues to deploy a 『Magic Barrier』 of suitable power, and moreover, he's told me to not handle my personnel roughly.

That's like saying that my usage of a demon is rough while at the same time making sure that Agnes and the others don't find out about his true identity.

It's probably because he doesn't want to lose the right to excavate the underground ruins found in the Baumeister Earldom by having his identity exposed, though.

"But, Arnest-san has an amazing amount of mana. I've heard about most of the advanced magicians, but I've got to know him today for the first time."

"Y-Yeah...he's the Earl Baumeister House little treasure."

Given that Agnes is great at classroom learning, she has learned the names of all famous advanced magicians.

She tells me that she was surprised to learn of Arnest only today, but I wing it in a hurry by describing him as a hidden gem.

No matter how close I might be with Agnes' group, I cannot afford to let them know about the

existence of demons.

Precisely because of that, I had Arnest masquerade himself, too.

"You know, that is a way of talking that somewhat lacks confidence, Earl Baumister."

"I don't want to be told that by you!"

"Sensei!"

Suddenly Betty yells.

It looks like the dragon golem is about to hit its limit soon.

Because it can't replenish its mana after the destruction of the device on the pedestal, it should run out of mana in a little while.

Even though it's been releasing powerful attacks at us, albeit for a short while, it's now just observing us.

"It's the final attack, but don't forget our first goal."

""""Okay!""""

The dragon golem, which has used up most of its mana, has apparently entered an energy conservation mode.

It has stopped attacking and sat down in front of the pedestal.

It's not like anything will be resolved by that, but I guess the installed artificial intelligence has ordered it to survive as long as possible.

For our side, there's no point in waiting any longer. As long as we get rid of that rat, all will be over. That's the most important goal, or rather, it'd be very bad if we allow that small rat to get away.

"If we don't destroy that rat, I won't be able to return to being an adult."

Even if we leave the dragon golem alone, it should stop working in a little bit anyway.

That means, it's far more important to not let the rat sitting on its head escape.

"Cindy! Betty! Let's go!"

"Yes!"

"Leave it to me!"

Upon Agnes' signal, they begin their final attack.

"Eeey!"

First, Agnes creates a huge 『Wind Cutter』...or so I thought, but it's actually an improved, unique version of a 『Wind Cutter』.

The dragon golem, pinned down by a huge wind cluster from above, can't escape because it's on the verge of running out of mana.

The rat can't free its body from the dragon golem either, and it looks as if it's stuck to the dragon's head.

I doubt that it's only owed to the wind pressure.

"Rat! I won't let you run away!"

Next, Cindy shoots a focused 『Flame Arrow』 at the rat.

The rat can't dodge as it can't move. The 『Flame Arrow』 penetrates its body, and on top of that, the fur covering its body catches fire.

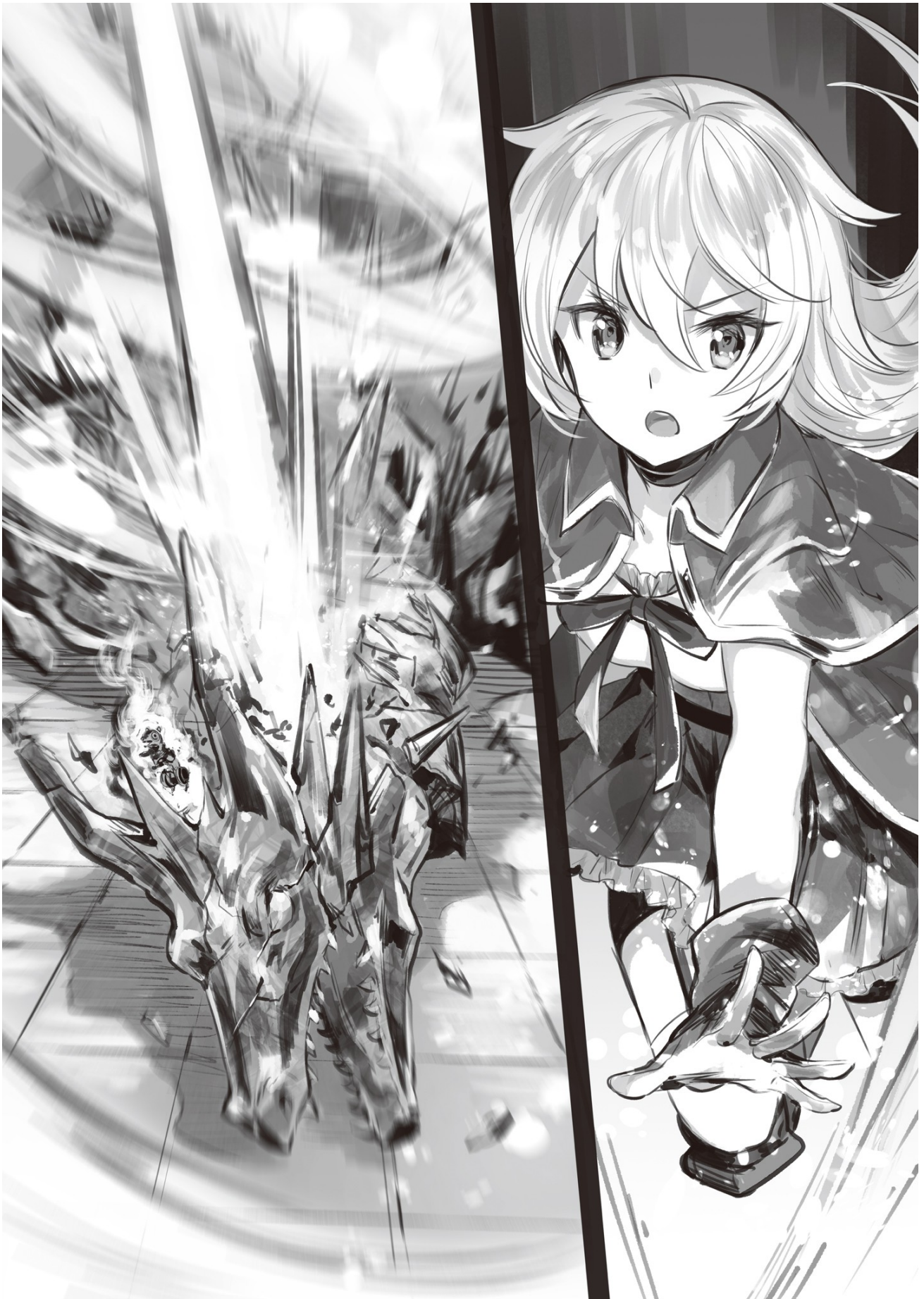
Its inner structure should have been fried by the 『Flame Arrow』, so the rat will likely stop working with this as well.

"This will finish it!"

In the end, Betty skewers the dragon golem with a long, focused 『Flame Arrow』. At long last Agnes' team has succeeded in destroying the rat and the dragon golem.

"Agnes-chan, Cindy-chan, did we do it?"

"I confirmed that they stopped working."



"Betty, we did it."

The three celebrate by hugging each other as they finally defeated a formidable enemy, but it's still too early to rejoice.

They are still inexperienced and careless since they're newcomers.

"Not yet! All three of you, deploy your 『Magic Barriers』 at full throttle!"

"Eh? That golem has already..."

"Hurry! It's an order!"

""""Okay!""""

Hearing my forceful demand, all three deploy firm 『Magic Barriers』 in a hurry.

At the same time, the dragon golem blows up, scattering its fragments all over the cave.

Like a buckshot, the fragments loudly clash against the barriers due to the force of the explosion.

If we had been directly hit by those, it's a safe bet that we'd suffered serious injuries, or died in the worst case.

"No way, for it to blow itself up..."

Agnes looks mortified as she hadn't expected that.

Forgetting the joy over the dragon golem subjugation, she's chewing on her lips.

"Sensei, how did you know?"

"It was faint, but mana was still squirming around within its body. It looked as though the rat also moved a bit."

It was a possibility that they simply had some mana left, but to me it seemed as though the residue mana stirred, and in the first place, the dragon golem was a machine built to protect this ruin.

I thought that it might very likely try to deliver a final blow against the intruders, who got careless because of their victory, before completely stopping to function.

It's because it probably assumed that it might be good in the cost vs. efficiency ratio if it could cause heavy injuries to the intruders, even if it hadn't gone as far as killing them.

On top, there was another device that could order that, namely, the rat.

And in fact, it was correct to have the three quickly put up their 『Magic Barriers』.

"As expected of you, sensei. I got careless..."

"I'm going to reflect on this."

"The golems in underground ruins sure are scary..."

Having said that, it was the first golem with a self-destruction function among the artifacts in the ruins located in the Kingdom.

If you ask why I realized it, it'd be owed to me having plentifully experienced such golems during the Empire's civil war.

That means I've become that distrustful of such artifacts.

"Even so, putting aside your failure to notice its self-destruction at the end, you managed to put up a good fight against it."

Agnes, Betty, and Cindy are still minors.

It'd be problematic to be too strict with them. If they are able to deal with such an opponent up to this point on their first encounter, I think it'll be alright as long as they hold a proper review meeting later on.

"Uuuuhh! The precious artifacts! I will not be able to gather much data with them self-destroying!"

"That's what you worry about..."

At the same time as the complete destruction of the dragon golem has been confirmed, Arnest, who has served as shield so far as it goes, swiftly approached the wreckage.

He allows his occupational disease to rear its head, and only mourns the fact that precious, historic data has been lost.

"It is really regretful."

"Bear with it."

Since we've confirmed our safety, I quickly look for the rat that had been blown away to some place by the dragon golem's explosion.

I spot it right away, but after it was smashed against the ceiling due to the explosion's energy, it has died.

No, I guess it's weird to call it 'died'...

Its exterior fur has burned to cinders, and it has now turned into simple junk.

But that's the point. I still haven't returned to my original body.

"There's no change to my body. Just what the hell is going on here?"

I grill Arnest about this.

"About that, you will remain like that for two or three days longer."

"Why!?"

Shouldn't I change back since the caster has been fully destroyed?

"That rat has used a spell that will turn you into a child for a fixed period of time, Earl Baumeister. If the rat had survived, it would have continued to supply the spell with mana from somewhere in this ruin, resulting in you remaining a child indefinitely."

That rat would have probably been able to replenish its mana while freely moving within this ruin, using its small body.

Other than riding the dragon golem's head and ordering it around to make it attack us, it'd have replenished its mana with the pedestals function with the goal to keep the spell, which turned me

into a child, going.

"Since the rat has been destroyed, resulting in the spell's mana supply running dry, the possibility of you remaining a child for eternity is gone. The spell will wear off, but that's a matter which will take several days."

"I see."

At the least, two or three more days like this, huh...?

"Sensei, are you going to stay like this for a while?"

"That sure sounds troublesome."

What are Elise and the others going to think if I return home like this?
Even though my children are going to be born very soon, their father is in such a state.

"Still, although you look like a child, we were saved by you, sensei."

That's what you'd call old man's wisdom.
My current mana is at elementary level, so I should be almost at the bottom of my own magician class.
Of course I can't use very powerful spells either.
Accordingly, I supported Agnes' group by scheming in my own way, using 『Flash』 to steal the opponent's sight.

"That was the implementation of coming up with good plans which you're always talking about, right sensei?"

"It's as you say, Betty."

The result will drastically differ depending on the way you use your mana.
It means, one should always fight while considering how to use magic in the most efficient way, and not just waste mana on releasing spells while ambiguously using your mana.

"Even with the same amount of mana, the result will change depending on its use. Right now, I'm deeply impressed as I recall your magic, sensei!"

"We couldn't have won alone. Sensei, you're awesome after all!"

"It's great that I'm your student, sensei."

Currently Agnes' group has ability at a level in the upper ranks of intermediate level.
If they come up with good schemes, it'll be possible for them to give even magicians at the advanced level a good run for their money.
In order to realize that, they have to plan and use their brain.

"That all-important sensei of yours looks like this, though." (Arnest)

"Again with the unnecessary comments..."

That damn Arnest keeps dissing me for having been turned into a child through magic. But you know, it's definitely impossible for humans to live on while always being cautious of all kinds of possible dangers. No matter who they might be, people will always be careless in one way or another.

"Can you actually talk about others!?"

"I am a scholar."

He truly got a retort to everything.
I'm 100% sure that you have no friends.

"By the way, there is something I must inform you about, Earl Baumeister."

"What is it that you must tell me?"

"This rat has been too high-spec for a defense device."

"That means..."

It could use magic to turn adults into children, it could eternally move around the ruin while resupplying its mana, and in the end it tried to get rid of us by manipulating a dragon golem. Considering its small body, it seemed to be crammed with many functions...

"What does that mean, Arnest-san?"

"This rat can be called a superior device within the system maintaining this underground ruin, going beyond what I had thought of it at first."

Arnest answers Agnes' question relatively honestly.
I can sense a slight discrimination based on gender here.

"So it was modeled after a rat to put many intruders off guard?"

"That is correct."

Bah, as I thought, he had frankly answered Betty's question as well.
And yet I feel like he only throws sarcastic remarks my way.

"In case the rat as a superior device is destroyed, the system of this ruin will strengthen its vigilance even further. So it's highly likely that it'll try everything to remove us intruders, correct?"

"Indeed. Earl Baumeister, your pupils are excellent."

"Why yes, thank you..."

Arnest politely answers Cindy's question as well, but it's obvious that he's discriminating against

men after all.

Since I've heard that this guy has been a school professor, I think it's also possible that he's just unexpectedly helpful towards students.

Or so I thought...

Beee——p!

Beee——p!

Beee——p!

Beee——p!

"A buzzer?"

"Warning sound?"

"Why all of a sudden?"

Suddenly an annoying warning sound echoes across the entire cave. We begin to check our vicinity in a hurry, wondering what's going on.

"What does this mean?"

"Going by my estimation, it means that an offensive system to remove the intruders, who destroyed the rat, has activated after having confirmed their presence with the rat's destruction. I must say, this is a system far more sophisticated than I had expected. It is a precious sample and legacy of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era."

"Right now is not the time for that!"

By just hearing this warning sound, we could understand that we've been plunged into a considerably dangerous situation.

It looks there's still more trials ahead of us.