

"We'll be finished if the small dragons manage to reach us and start attacking us from behind. We'll use our full power to speedily destroy that dragon head over there. If we manage that, we won't die in this place at least."

Considering our current grade of exhaustion, we'll be in a bind if there's another floor, but we don't have the leeway to preserve our strength in preparation for that either. We can replenish our mana, but being unable to get rid of our fatigue is a fairly heavy burden. And if we were to choose the stupid move of resting now, we'd get tormented to death while getting attacked by golems from the front and back.

Right now we don't have any other choice but to quickly break through this floor at full power, and pray to the gods for what might come next.

"Are there any objections to this plan?" I ask while looking at Arnest, the one most likely to have a different opinion among those present.

"None. Given all these contrivances we have encountered so far, that dragon head must be the last boss, and can also be regarded as the one manipulating the traps and golems on the lower floors. I do not believe that it is such a bad gamble to crush it with all our remaining strength."

"That's how it is. Let's go!"

""""Okay!""""

We begin to charge towards the dragon head in a straight line, adopting a rhombic formation with Agnes in the lead, Cindy, Betty and me, and then Arnest at the end.

"Sensei, are you alright?"

"I'm well aware that it's unreasonable, but since it's for a short period of time, I'm boosting my running speed with 『Body Strengthening』."

Since I'd become a big burden to Arnest if I had him carry me on his back as he did until now, I've got no choice but to run as well. Because I'm sprinting at the average speed of an adult by using 『Body Strengthening』 on my child body, it puts a heavy strain on it. Given that I have a low amount of mana as well, I'm forced to frequently replenish my mana through magic gems. This makes it inevitable for my body to become sluggish while accompanied by headaches, but I keep enduring all of this since it's still better than dying here.

"Gueeh——!"

"Sshhaaa——!"

Having noticed our approach, the small dragons fire their breaths at us, but all of them are blocked by Arnest's 『Magic Barrier』.

It'll never end, no matter how many of these small fry we kill, so we've got no choice but to get close to the dragon head.

"Sensei, the golems' behavior is..."

Betty is the first to notice that the dragon golems floating in some areas are taking refuge.

"It's the ones blocking the straight line between us and the dragon head. Maybe..."

"I'm pretty sure you're correct, Agnes. All of you, deploy your 『Magic Barriers』 and reinforce them!"

Immediately following, the dragon head releases a torrent of bluish-white light in our direction.

"A non-attribute breath!?"

Even if it's just a head, it's still a dragon, so spitting breath is a matter of course. Its firepower is nothing to scoff at either.

With me also deploying my 『Magic Barrier』 alongside the others, it feels like we're barely managing to prevent the breath to break through. Of course it's costing us all an extreme amount of mana. We keep blocking the breath with our barriers while replenishing our mana with the magic gems at hand.

"It gives me a headache!"

"Me too!"

Given that even Arnest feels it, it's only logical for me to suffer from the burden with my child body.

The girls don't say anything, but since they have been replenishing their mana with magic gems several times in a short span of time, they ought to have headaches and sluggish bodies as well.

"Nevertheless, we've got no other way but to proceed onwards!"

Even if it might be an artificial object, it's still not capable of shooting its breath indefinitely. After around a minute, the dragon head's breath ceases for the moment.

We keep advancing during that time, but one minute later, the small dragon golems retreat out of the firing range again. At once the second breath attack begins, forcing us to stop on the spot.

We continue exhausting our mana, stamina and mental strength as we deploy our 『Magic Barriers』 to not get hit by the breath attacks. After several repetitions of this we've become quite worn-out, but in exchange we've managed to approach the dragon head up to a distance of several dozen meters.

"Offensive magic is impossible for me."

"We know that. Arnest, you put maximum priority on protecting yourself!"

Upon my signal, Arnest shrinks his 『Magic Barrier』 so that it only covers himself. At the same

time, I take a huge amount of stones out of my magic bag and pile them up in front of Agnes' group.

"Everyone get down, and then you girls simultaneously use wind magic!"

"Oh! Understood! Cindy! Betty!"

Agnes seems to have immediately grasped my intention. All three of them create a powerful magic gale. Although it's a spacious room, it's still airtight.

The stones whirled up by their wind magic fly about like bullets, rapidly shooting down the small dragons around us. Of course stones also head out way, but I deal with those with a small 『Magic Barrier』. Given that I just have to protect the area right above us since we're lying on the ground, it's something I can handle even with my currently low mana.

"Their numbers have decreased nicely...Arnest!"

"I got it."

Arnest stands up right in front of the dragon head, acting as decoy. Although the dragon head tries to fire its breath at him, Arnest keeps trifling with it by quickly moving left and right.

"Girls, disperse to the sides, and target the dragon head!"

""""Okay!""""

I order Agnes' team to destroy the dragon head. Since it's nothing I can handle myself, I've got no choice but to entrust it to them.

I suppose you could call it fortunate, but it looks like the dragon head can't move its head all the way since it's a decoration on the wall. As long as we stay on the sides close to the wall, no breaths from the dragon head will reach us.

"It looks like the small dragons are compensating for the breaths' blind spots."

While we move to places safe from breath attacks, another batch of several dozen small dragons flies out of the ejection holes, so Agnes' team keeps shooting them down with magic in succession. They can easily kill them off since they aren't all that sturdy, but their numbers are still an issue.

I block the ejection holes with rocks I took out of my magic bag, but my hands don't reach the holes high up on the wall. As the dragons try to get out of the ejection holes I managed to block, I can hear repeated clattering as metal clashes against rock.

"Agnes! Can you attack the head?"

"I have my hands full!"

"Cindy, you?"

"Me too!"

"Betty!"

"I can't either!"

At the end I look at Arnest, but he's fully preoccupied with protecting himself. Because Arnest can't use any offensive magic that would work against the small dragons anyway, he's instead attracting the attention of the small dragons coming out of the holes that are still open, drawing their breath attacks on himself.

I can't ask anything unreasonable from him.

"This is problematic..."

We've managed to somehow struggle through this so far, but this party is severely lacking firepower after all. If they get a bit older, Agnes and the other two should be able to become excellent magicians, but at present they lack experience and have their hands full with taking on the small dragons that keep rushing out of the open holes.

Because the small dragons shoot breaths, their attack frequency will inevitably drop if they also have to block and dodge.

"(If only Katharina was here...)"

She would have been able to shift to the next offensive spell after annihilating the small dragons in one go... Well, I guess it's pointless to lament over a combat asset that's not here.

"Earl Baumeister! I feel that things are getting dangerous!" Arnest yells something like a warning while devoting himself to defense.

Once I use 『Detect』 in a hurry, I perceive that the iron door sealing off the lower floor has apparently been wrenched open. A great number of small dragon golems are in the process of approaching us from behind.

"We're running out of time, I guess..."

"New ones have come out!"

"There's no end to it!"

"We have to quickly destroy the dragon head!"

It looks like the dragon head is smarter than expected. Its crimson, shining eyes have read that Agnes' team has the biggest firepower in our party. Thus it has the small dragons focus their attacks on the girls. Having said that, it's not like it's ignoring Arnest or me either.

For the sake of drawing the dragon head's attention, Arnest is busy moving to the sides, back, and forth. I'm busy with dodging or blocking the small dragon's attacks.

As a result of that, my exhaustion gradually accumulates, and I'm getting sleepy despite moving around a lot. My body feels heavy, too.

At this rate we will fully run out of power, and get killed by the small dragons.

"Now that it's come to this, it's sink or swim! Agnes, Betty, Cindy! Please cover me!"

Rather than getting slowly killed off like this...if it's the end with this, I'll replenish my mana with the magic gems, despite getting attacked by even more sleepiness and lethargy. This child body has long passed its limit. Still, I cannot afford to fall asleep right now.

I take an arrow out of my magic bag, and stab it into my thigh.

"Sensei?"

"This fully woke me up! Here I come!"

Next I float up, approaching the height of the dragon head with 『Flight』. Of course the small dragons hurl their breaths at me, but those are shot down with non-attribute magic by Agnes' team.

"All three of you have definitely grown!"

I guess one real battle is a lot more worth than a hundred lessons, as expected... All three have become much faster at switching their spells.

While being covered by the girls, I float up to a height allowing me to target the dragon head's right eye.

"It'll be over if this doesn't work, but it doesn't mean that it has no chance of success."

I take out the bow, which I used during my childhood, and a special arrow, which I had created in preparation for a possible time of need, out of my magic bag, and nock the arrow onto my bow.

"Sensei! It'll be impossible with such a short arrow!"

"Maybe, maybe not."

After all, this arrow doesn't use a regular arrowhead, but a magic gem with lots of mana stored into it. I form a thread with my remaining mana, and connect my head and the magic gem at the tip of this arrow with that thread. It's something similar to a fuse created out of mana.

Connecting it to my head is for the sake of making the huge amount of mana in the gem explode at the ideal moment. It's something I noticed after doing lots of various magic research: it's difficult to make mana explode even if there is a lot of mana in the air, but it's possible to make mana explode inside magic stones or magic crystals, depending on how you do it.

However, the difference in mana quality would be a bottleneck with the mana in magic stones, resulting in a decreased firepower. But, exactly because it's a magic gem containing my own mana, it's a feasible method.

"On the other hand, it's going to break an expensive, rare high-capacity magic gem! I can't even imagine what's going to happen if I make this much mana explode."

Right now I might get dragged into a big explosion and die in the worst case. But, I think that's still preferable over getting tormented to death by small dragon golems.

"I can't tell you how strong the explosion is going to be! Protect yourself!"

"But, what about you, sensei!?"

""Sensei!""

No choice but to go for it! Even if I die after getting swallowed up by the explosion, I'll have at least carried out the good deed of protecting my students as a teacher. Even if I were to be sent to another world again, I shouldn't be punished with an overly harsh life. That's just a guess lacking any foundation, though.

"Here we go!"

I release my special arrow towards the dragon head. At this angle, it shouldn't be capable of shooting it down with a breath. It wouldn't be an issue even if I hadn't directly hit its eye, but that worry proved to be unnecessary.

Using the mana thread connected to my head, I swiftly cause the mana in the magic gem at the arrow's tip to explode.

"This...might end really badly..."

Because I made the mana explode inside the magic gem while maintaining 『Flight』 at the same time, I exceed my fatigue limit, and start falling to the ground with my consciousness fading away. Meanwhile the mana inside the magic gem explodes, shining brightly in a radius, obviously possessing a ridiculous firepower.

I heard that the world around you will proceed in slow-motion on the verge of death, but right now I'm truly experiencing it as I'm slowly getting swallowed by the light.

I doubt that Agnes' team would be in time with any rescue attempts. Unfortunately, it's game over for me at this point.

"If possible, I wanted to see the faces of my children though..."

That's how far my thoughts went on the verge of the explosion drawing close to my body, and then I blacked out.



Just before losing consciousness, my final thoughts are about my children who are going to be born, and I keep apologizing to my yet-unborn children, only hoping that they'll forgive their worthless father.

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