

Chapter 3 - Getting out at any cost

"Sensei! Look!"

"Another one!?"

Cindy points at the stone wall behind the pedestal that served as the dragon golem's station to replenish its mana.

Suddenly that wall falls apart with a clattering, and a huge dragon golem, modeled after a Chinese dragon, appears on the other side. Moreover, looking closely, this dragon golem has a construction at his lower body half that seems to move like a caterpillar.

"A dragon tank!"

"Earl Baumeister, that is exactly what it is called."

For there to have existed tanks during the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization. But then again, it's not a gun turret, but the upper body of a dragon that's been installed at the part equal to a tank's upper frame. It seems it's not a tank firing a cannon, but one with a dragon head spitting out a breath.

"(I feel like there was such a kaijuu in ○traman...we gotta escape!)"

When I look behind me at once, I spot the stairs leading to the upper floor. Since there's apparently nothing like stairs or corridors on the other side of the wall from where the dragon tank came, it should be safer, or rather, less of an energy waste to not awkwardly fight here, and instead escape backwards.

"Sensei, we're not going to defeat this?"

"No need!"

I curtly answer Betty's question.

"We're exhausted after being suddenly transferred to this cave, and fighting against the rat and a dragon golem. Given that we don't know the precise location of this place, we can't escape through 『Teleport』 either. In short, it's unclear when we might be able to leave this place."

"While at it, I should add that it is possible that we will not get any chance to take a rest." (Arnest)

As a result of us having destroyed the rat, the underground ruin has become genuinely pissed off, and set us as targets for a thorough removal.

I wonder, is that dragon tank only the beginning?

"We will escape by climbing the stairs behind us!"

Going by how the dragon tank is built, I doubt that it'll be capable of following us upstairs.

As it's not like it's necessary to fight the tank and win, escaping and preserving our mana and stamina will raise our chance of survival.

"In the end, we don't know in what way we will be able to return to the surface, with me still being a child for a while. Avoid any unnecessary battles."

""""Yes!""""

"Arnest, we're running. Lend me your back."

"Eh? Me?"

You still haven't realized? And yet you call yourself a scholar...

"I'm in such a state, right!?"

Even if I were to run at full speed, I can't believe that I'd be able to get away from the approaching dragon tank. It's not like I can get Agnes or the other two to carry me either, so the only choice left is Arnest.

"I am someone working by using my head."

"You can also leave me behind and run, but I don't care what happens to you afterwards, okay?"

Arnest being able to carefreely work as archaeologist in the Baumeister Earldom as a demon is based on my patronage and the Kingdom's toleration. If he were to desert me here and run away, the Kingdom wouldn't be lenient with him any longer. I'm pretty sure they'd have him slave away until his death for the sake of the Kingdom's benefit.

"If you're fine with that, go for it."

"You do say something very typical of a high-ranking noble while looking like this. I suppose it can not be helped."

Arnest picks me up, and starts to run towards the stairs. His pace is quite steady. I see, it looks like his legs and loins are quite strong since he's also doing field work, although he calls himself a scholar.

"Earl Baumeister, I think you already know, but..."

"Incoming!"

The dragon tank spit its breath as it chases after us. Upon my signal, Arnest deploys a 『Magic Barrier』 behind him, blocking the breath. He has tried to emphasize that I should be the one to make the call then to deploy the 『Magic Barrier』, since he himself doesn't have the spare time to check his back because he's carrying me, and if he kept up a 『Magic Barrier』, even at times it's not necessary, he'd run out of mana sooner or later, even if he has a big mana pool.

"Sensei, you okay?"

"I'm alright, so go up the stairs as fast as you can!"

""""Okay!""""

Anyway, we've gotta get out of this shitty ruin as quickly as possible. Seeing how we don't know on what floor we're right now, and what kind of traps and mechanisms have been installed on the floor above, we should avoid any unnecessary exhaustion.

"With that structure of the lower body half, that thing should have difficulties to climb the stairs. As long as we manage to get away..."

"Sensei! It's climbing up the stairs!"

Damn! Just as Cindy has pointed out, the dragon tank slowly but steadily begins to climb the stairs.

"Tsk! So it can get up stairs as well, eh!?"

"Sensei, we've got no choice but to destroy it!"

"Wait! Don't waste your mana!"

I don't know how much further we must go. It's possible for us to recover our mana, but we might get successively chased by other traps and machines of this ruin from now on. No matter how well our mana might recover, if we continue in a tired state, we won't be capable of using mana decently, and in the worst case, even moving itself will become difficult.

"To be honest, we're in a fairly terrible situation. That's why, you've got to economize on your mana and stamina."

"Got it. But sensei..."

"A method like this exists as well!"

I get off Arnest's back, take out several sheets from my magic bag, and spread them out as if to cover the stairway.

"Earl Baumeister?"

"There's still more to come."

Next I soak the sheets with plenty of plant-based oil as it's used in cooking. It's still a new, unused bottle, but now's not the time to whine about waste.

"The only one considering such things in a situation like this is you, Earl Baumeister."

"You don't need to comment each and every little thing! It'll be fine with this."

Once I check the situation down the stairs after climbing the stairs to some extent, the dragon tank's

caterpillars slip on the oil-soaked sheets, unable to continue climbing, just as I've planned.

"For there to exist such a way...sensei, you're amazing!"

"How did you come up with this?"

"Sensei, aweso——ome!"

Most people living in this world have never seen anything like a tank moving on caterpillars, so it's no wonder that Agnes and the other two highly praise me for being able to deal with the tank on a first sighting.

In reality, it's knowledge from a manga I read in my previous life. But even if that's the truth, it's not a problem as long as it's not exposed. I've got to retain my dignity as a teacher.

"It works surprisingly well. And here I thought about giving you advice after seeing the structure of the dragon tank."

"I'm really sorry about that. I'll leave the next to you then."

That Arnest sure is amazing to spot the dragon tank's weak spot when seeing it for the first time.

"Sensei, what are you going to do next? Set it on fire?"

"No, I think we can simply ignore it."

Agnes suggests to me that it might be safer to destroy the tank by igniting the oil soaking the sheets, but I reject that proposal for several reasons.

"First, I'd like to avoid wasting mana since we don't know where to find the exit of this ruin. Second, the dragon tank might be able to start climbing the stairs again once the oil burns down."

Given that the tank is unmanned, there's no guarantee that setting it on fire will stop its functionality. I think it's safer to leave the tank in its current state where it can't get up the stairs as it keeps slipping downwards.

Besides, a much higher temperature than one would expect is needed to ignite vegetable oil, which is at room temperature.

"Sensei! In front!"

"It looks like we won't really have the leeway to bother with the dragon tank in the back, doesn't it?"

One object after the other heads in our direction from the entrance to the next floor at the top of the stairway. Looking closely, they are small, metallic dragon golems with a length of around 50 centimeters. They are flying through the air while making use of their small wings.

The number...around ten, I'd say?

"That means, the next floor is a nest of those small dragon golems. It seems we will not be allowed to take a rest."

"Seems so..."

Just as expected, the ruin doesn't intend to give us the time to recover our stamina and mana.

"Got it, Agnes? The goal isn't in sight, and we won't be readily given the chance to rest up. Saving on mana plays a crucial role here."

"Okay. So, what are we going to do?"

"Well, we've got no choice but to destroy the small dragons either way. Please do it while keeping your mana usage as low as possible."

""Yes, sensei!""

It might be a result of their education. Agnes' team destroys the small dragons floating in front with concentrated 『Wind Cutters』, and with that we finally succeed in clearing the first floor. The number of floors left...is unknown.



"Now a maze, huh...?"

"It is a setup to prevent intruders from escaping."

Once we reach the next floor, we're greeted by a huge maze. Considering it's an underground labyrinth, the ceiling is rather high. Every now and then, openings similar to hatches are visible on the ceiling, and whenever we get close to one of those hatches, it opens up, and small dragon golems, just like the ones before, rush out in droves.

"It is quite troublesome as it's very narrow here."

The golems are small, but that doesn't change the fact that they're modeled after dragons. Once you get close to them, the dragons will spit their breath at you. Those breaths unexpectedly pack quite the punch, which means a human would suffer terrible injuries or burns if basked by the flames without adopting any countermeasures.

Accordingly, Betty and Arnest timely deploy their 『Magic Barriers』, blocking the flames for us.

"Sensei, Agnes-chan, Cindy-chan, stay together as close as possible."

"Sure."

If we're hit by the flames, we'll bear serious injuries, but on the other hand, it makes it easy to block

them. Consequently, they must deploy 『Magic Barriers』 each and every time, and moreover, we won't be able to proceed onward unless we destroy the dragons in our way.

It's a truly nasty setup that continues to gradually whittle down our mana and stamina.

"Sensei, how should we advance?"

"In a maze you always advance while following the left wall!"

It was definitely impossible that we'd be able to clear this underground ruin by just ascending one floor. Not to mention that we don't have any detailed information about this labyrinth-like floor. Always advancing along the left wall, the basics of getting through a labyrinth, is the most efficient method here, I think.

This is knowledge that's also taught at the adventurer's guild, but Agnes, Betty, and Cindy seem to have completely forgotten about it after getting totally panicked.

It was the same for us in the past as well. It's something that's inevitable since they're beginners.

"Eeey! Drop dead! Drop dead!"

"Sensei! It's annoying as they keep appearing one after the other!"

"Agnes! Cindy! Don't think about killing all of them!"

There are hatches installed all over the ceiling on this floor, and small dragon golems keep rushing out of there. Agnes and Cindy attack all the dragons surging out from there with magic, but I have them stop that.

Even if every single dragon is small and weak, it'll take a lot of mana to wipe out all of them.

"We will run while following the left wall and blocking the breath attacks with 『Magic Barriers』! Stay together as much as possible, and control the mana used on the 『Magic Barriers』!"

"Sensei, we can recover our mana with magic gems."

"No, doing it too frequently is a bad idea."

I shoot down Cindy's objection.

If you consider that the dragon tank tried to chase after us, even going as far as climbing the stairs, the small dragons of this floor might pursue us as well. In other words, it's obvious that we won't be allowed any decent break until we get out of this ruin.

"Even if you can recover your mana, the same can't be said for your stamina and mental fatigue. It would be nice if we could take a break somewhere, but going by the events so far, we likely won't be able to take much of a break."

Even if we were to try to rest between the floors, a golem group from the lower floor would

immediately come after us. We've blocked the dragon tank, but the small dragon golems can fly and have big numbers. If we were to take it easy by sitting around, we'd be likely surrounded by many small dragons in no time.

"Moreover, we've also got the problem of healing magic."

I'm the only one who can use healing magic within this party, and on top of that, I've got only mana at an elementary level as a child right now. I can only heal small injuries. Hence, if someone gets heavily injured, the party will wipe, or we won't have any other choice but leaving that person behind.

"Let's hide somewhere until you return to normal, sensei."

"I think that will be difficult."

I reject Betty's suggestion as well. It's because none of us knows precisely when I will return to normal.

Arnest's guess is ultimately just that, a guess. If I'm unlucky, it's possible that I'll stay like this for another week. And I can't imagine at all that we'll find a place to hide where we won't be attacked by golems during that time.

"As such, we've got no choice but to keep escaping upwards. Save your mana, and crush the minimum necessary amount of golems and traps standing in our way."

The replenishment of mana itself will work out sufficiently with magic gems, but if you use that method several times a day, the mental exhaustion becomes terrible.

"Not only crushing invaders through sturdy combat units, but turning the invaders into children with magic, sending them to the lowest floor with the 『Deadly Inversion Regulation』. which was fairly popular during the Ancient Magic Civilization's era, and killing the enemies by making the gradually tire out. This underground ruin must be an army facility from the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization."

I see. I had wondered why the first dragon tank used a caterpillar at its lower frame, but I guess it's because of the risk of it being easily destroyed due to its weight if it had used four legs to walk while tracking the enemy. It wouldn't be necessary to worry about something like that if you could place it on top of a pedestal as gun battery replacement, but it'd be meaningless if that dragon tank couldn't move.

Caterpillars to lower the maintenance burden, and a stressing of a mass production nature for the small dragon golems so that they could keep overwhelming the enemies with numbers. Arnest notices that those characteristics are biased towards weapons.

"Thus, I also agree with the plan to destroy the least necessary amount as proposed by Earl Baumeister."

Seeing that we don't know how many golems dwell in this ruin, we have no option but to advance while making sure to not get exhausted as much as possible.

"Well, we also have a burden with us, to put it diplomatically."

"I'm sorry, okay!?"

At first I believed that turning the invaders into children was for the sake of lowering the mana pool, but for there to actually have been another aim...

With me having become a child, I have low stamina, and my running speed is slow as well. I had planned for us to run through this floor without defeating the small dragons as much as possible, but to be frank, I've become the biggest hindrance to that plan. In short, an underground ruin exploration is too much of a strain for a child.

"Sensei has sacrificed for me, so even if I have to carry him on my back..."

"That's a big no."

Given that Cindy is the youngest one among the three, it'll be hard on her to run while carrying me, even if I might be a child. Since she also must use magic depending on the situation, that would be extremely harsh.

"We have Arnest with us for such times."

I tell Arnest to lend me his back once more. This guy is often doing excavation work outside, so he got strong legs, and quite a bit of stamina.

"I know." (Arnest)

"You will be able to explore this place as much as you like once we get out of here, okay?"

Though, that deal's off if I die.

"Excavating such a huge ruin with many golems has a charm I cannot resist."

Once Arnest carries me on his back, the party's travel speed goes up right away.

While we follow the left walls of the labyrinth, Betty blocks the breath attacks with her 『Magic Barriers』, and Agnes as well as Cindy mow down the individuals and groups that would hinder our advance with offensive magic. At the end of the line, Arnest blocks the breaths spit by the big amount of dragons chasing after us with timely 『Magic Barriers』.

"Earl Baumeister, the swarm in the back is starting to become a problem!"

The dragons we left untouched behind and new dragons from the hatches in the ceiling have turned into a large flock. This means, we have to find the stairs to the upper floor quickly.

"Sensei!"

"Since we have no map for this maze, it will take time, but we got no choice but to follow the left

wall."

There wouldn't be anything worse than us returning to where we came from after unwisely trying to take a shortcut. In the end, it's 『Slow and steady wins the race』.

"Sensei, wouldn't it be better if we wiped out the flock of dragons with magic once?"

"I'm pretty sure that this is the aim of the one who designed this ruin."

Sweeping the entire flock will consume a lot of mana, and it wouldn't hold back further dragons from coming out. Having said that, our front and rear is packed with masses of small dragons. Now then, what should we do about this...?

"Everyone, immediately squat down upon my mark!"

"Sensei?"

"Agnes! Where's your answer?"

"Okay!"

"You others, too!"

""""Yes!""""

It's fine if they got it.

Several seconds after that, I order everyone to squat on the spot, "Now! Crouch down!"

Immediately after everyone does as told, the breath attacks of the group in front passes above our heads, directly hitting the group in our rear. The small dragon golems can spit fire and are great for mass production, but it looks like their defensive capabilities are rather limited, as I thought.

The flock of dragons hit by their allies' breaths didn't break apart flashily or melted into goo, but they crashed to the floor in succession after being damaged. It looks no device to skilfully command and coordinate the attacks efficiently has been installed in the small dragon golems. It's probably because it'd have made them unsuited for mass production and prevented keeping them small-sized if something like that had been added as well.

"That's all for the example. For now, we gotta advance at full speed!"

""""Okay!""""

We gather up once more, and keep advancing with Betty and Arnest blocking the breath attacks of the dragons that continued to increase in numbers. While maintaining a path by exterminating the small dragons through friendly fire with the method I had shown earlier, once their numbers increased too much, we finally arrived at the stairs leading to the third floor.



"I surely hadn't expected for a child's body to become such a burden...I think I'm getting sleepy."

"A child needs its sleeping time." (Arnest)

"Since it's truly a child's body, it also tires quickly."

"Children also require naps."

"Still, this isn't a situation allowing me to sleep around!"

Having broken through the labyrinth's first floor with the dragon tank and the second floor with the flock of small dragon golems, we climb the stairs to the third floor. Because the golems of this underground labyrinth are going to pursue us as soon as we stop our feet, any hope for a rest on the stairway ends up in vain all too easily.

"After wearing down the invaders by not giving them the time to rest, they surround them with numbers to go for the kill. It is a labyrinth full of traps that seem to have been thought up by a truly malicious soldier."

Does Arnest bear some grudges against soldiers? Military is a necessary evil in any world. It's not strange for an army to have some bad apples in its ranks, is it?

"Sensei, there's a big group incoming from behind!" Cindy reports to me.

Unlike the dragon tank which ran on caterpillars, the small dragons can fly, and thus have continued following us while growing in number. To me it seems like their numbers keep increasing the more time passes.

"Don't mind them! We're going to rush onto the third floor just like that!"

"I think it'd be better to have the enemies fall back a bit by landing at least one blow on them." Cindy says while looking at the huge amount of dragons closing in on us from behind.

Hmm, she's not wrong. Maybe we should lower their numbers a bit since their numbers have grown way big. But, it'd be a bad idea to make Cindy and the other two exhausted here.

Accordingly...

"Arnest, around one blow should be alright, no?"

"My...offensive magic is..."

"No, not that! I mean this."

I retrieve a throwing spear out of my magic bag. If he throws it after casting 『Body Strengthening』 on himself, he should be able to kill something at the level of small dragon golems.

"I have no confidence in my aim with this."

"Just throw it."

"Understood."

Reluctantly, Arnest increases his body's strength with magic, and throws the spear at the dragons in the rear. It's immediately obvious that it's a really poor throw, but without a moment's delay, I tune the spear's trajectory with my magic.

Arnest's spear causes quite a few dragons to be unable to continue pursuing us.

"What an admirable, direct hit."

"Well, I did adjust its flight path after all."

Even I'm capable of at least this much.

"Sensei, you're really amazing."

"Wow, to tune the spear's trajectory with a tiny bit of mana..."

"A skilled technique as expected of you."

"No, look, it was me who threw the spear here."

"Let's go on to the next floor."

We invade the third floor while ignoring Arnest's objection.



"Sensei! Is this a trap?"

"How should we interpret this?"

The third floor has a slightly weird atmosphere. The instant we entered it, the entrance door suddenly vanished. Moreover, the third floor also has a layout that looks like a simply, wide space.

It's clear that the room is gradually getting smaller, albeit slowly. The walls on all four sides are steadily approaching us. At this rate we might get crushed flat.

"Oohh! The door has vanished all of a sudden, locking us up. The seamless walls are moving, narrowing the room! This is a precious relic!"

"Now's not the time to admire the setup!"

Especially when we might end up getting crushed because of that precious relic! This is the reason why scholars are so...!

Still, he's right about it being mysterious for the door to suddenly vanish and the smooth walls to approach from all sides.

"It is nothing you have to worry about so much. It is relatively easy to get out of this trap."

"Really?"

"This floor is a trap to lure the invaders into a dilemma."

According to Arnest, the walls here should be destroyable with fairly powerful magic.

"A trap with such mysterious structure is actually surprisingly brittle. Having said that, since you must destroy it with a considerably powerful spell, it will deplete our mana."

Oh, I get it. The objective of the approaching walls isn't to crush the intruders, but to tire them out by forcing them to destroy the wall, huh?

In short, it's evident that this isn't the last floor of this ruin. It's because there's no change in the ruin's basic policy of gradually exhausting the intruders.

"Earl Baumeister, did you notice the other dilemma we are facing?"

"...It's about when we should make our escape, right?"

"That is correct."

"Sensei, what do you mean by that?"

Not only Agnes, but the other two also tilt their heads in confusion.

"Surely, the walls of this room are steadily closing in on us, and it's set in stone that we'll be crushed at this rate. But, that's still a long way off."

At the walls' current pace, we should be safe for at least one hour. Arnest should be assessing it in the same way.

"One hour, you say?"

"Yes. So here's a question to you, Betty: Should we rest for an hour and then advance after destroying the wall with magic? Or, should we immediately destroy and advance? Those are the two choices."

"I think we can rest for an hour..."

Thanks to the golems chasing after us up until now, we haven't had an opportunity to take a break.

Being able to rest up here for an hour is valuable. But, of course resting has its demerits, too. Either choice is right as neither is more advantageous.

"Both choices have merits and demerits."

"Try to first think about it by yourselves, and then choose either option."

At times it's necessary for adventurers to make such decisions. This is yet another troublesome matter as it's not said that there's necessarily always an obviously correct choice. There are times where the outcome won't change much, no matter which you choose, because of the merits and demerits offsetting each other for all alternatives.

However, if you make a fatal mistake in your choice and die because of that, you'll be blamed for having been a fool.

"Even so, you girls must make a decision. It's also possible to leave it to me, but it's not like I'll be always around to make the choices for you. Not to mention that I'm currently a burden as a child."

"Sensei, you're no burden!"

"Cindy, I'm capable of giving you some advice, but at present I have Arnest carry me. Please acknowledge the reality that I'm a burden. After all, you should factor my current usefulness based on that fact into your calculations. Oh, if you don't choose quickly, it'll naturally develop into us taking a break for an hour, but is that fine with you?"

I urge the girls to make their decision quickly. That's because not being able to choose one option as a result of merely having wasted the time on hesitating to choose while carefully scrutinizing the two alternatives is going to very likely have a completely different effect, even if they had chosen that option in the end.

"The merits of heading to the next floor right away...a decrease in the danger that the small dragons will chase after us from the second floor. Betty, what are the demerits?" Agnes asks Betty.

"Since we've got to destroy this place with magic either way, we'll expend a large amount of mana in any case. We've reached this place without any breaks, so I think it's a demerit to pile up mental fatigue. We can recover our mana with magic gems, but the same can't be said about fatigue."

"As there's no guarantee that we'll be able to take a break from here on out, I believe that it'd be advantageous to take a rest, even if it's just an hour. It's going to have an effect on alleviating the mental fatigue, and we'll recover a bit mana, too."

"Cindy, the small dragons of the second floor will gather up if we take a rest for an hour. If their numbers grow too big, we'll be forced to kill a part of them with magic, and thus might instead deplete our mana even more." Agnes objects Cindy's opinion.

This is how it should be. They'll be fine if they get close to a conclusion by having their opinions clash.

"Going by the structure of this room, I don't think that the small dragons can get close to us."

"Cindy-chan, it's better to go with the worst-case scenario. If we destroy the wall to get out of here, the device that made the entrance door disappear and locked us in might stop working. In such a case, the small dragons, which might have gathered in huge numbers on the stairway connecting the second with the third floor, are going to flood this place." Betty argues towards Cindy, basically saying that there'd be no meaning to have taken a break since it'll be necessary to deal with the swarm of golems.

"But, sensei is with us. Currently sensei has the stamina of an average child."

"The issue of sensei's stamina..."

Once Cindy brings up that my stamina won't last if I don't rest up for a bit, Betty starts brooding.

I guess I'll cut in here with a short comment.

"You don't need to consider me."

After all, I'll have Arnest carry me in the worst case.

"No, I actually think it's better to allow you to get some rest, sensei."

"...Why, Cindy?" Agnes, who has been silent for a bit, asks Cindy for her reasoning.

"I mean, making it impossible for that weird dragon golem to climb the stairs, and having the small dragons kill each other, both were sensei's plans. Even if sensei's stamina is that of an average child, his experience and thinking remains as it was, so having him rest up properly will become a trump card for us."

Right now, I don't have stamina either way. At this rate, I might unintentionally fall asleep if we don't take any rest. If that happens, they won't be able to rely on my decisions when it counts. I guess they want me to relieve my mental fatigue by getting a nap here, as short as it might be.

"Sensei's advice has been effective enough to get us all the way here."

"Certainly, it's just as you say, Cindy. Let's take a rest then. Sensei, is that alright with you?"

Agnes' group decides to advance after resting for an hour, and requests my approval.

"I'll follow your decision."

""Sensei...""

I've announced that I'd do that in the beginning. Also, we won't know which choice was actually correct until later.

"Pheew, I can finally take a break." Arnest, who can't read the mood as always, sits down on the spot while still carrying me.

"Hey! Put me down first!"

"I forgot."

This asshole, is this his revenge for having to continue carrying me? Well, whatever...

I get off Arnest's back, and sit down as well. A child's body really tires easily. By just sitting, I can feel how my exhaustion melts away. I think it's also the same for Agnes' group who has been plunged into such a situation all of a sudden today.

"We should sate our thirst in preparation. On the other hand, it might be better to desist from eating."

Given that digestion might use up stamina, it's better to avoid taking in anything solid, if possible. I take a flask out of my magic bag, and start drinking. The flask is filled with a juice using the Demon Forest's fruit.

"Arnest, you want to drink as well?"

"Yes. Since food will only obstruct my body's movements, I will just drink for now."

Arnest accepts the flask from me, and drinks up the juice within. In reality, it'd be fine to go with normal water blended with a small dose of sugar and salt, but it's fine like this since it'll dampen our spirits if we stick to the common rules too much.

Agnes' group also retrieved their canteens from their magic bags, and drank some.

"Earl Baumeister, I am going to take a little nap."

"Me too."

This child body truly tires too quickly. Though I somehow feel like I had a little bit more stamina during my time in the Baumeister Knightdom.

"This place is completely different from hills and plains where you can move around freely."

"I guess that makes sense in a way."

This situation, where we can't see the exit with enemies continuously popping out on us, probably places a heavy burden on a child's body.

"I think it'll make a difference if you can sleep, even if only for ten minutes..."

Since I've been stuck in this body now, my most important duty is to not get in the way of Agnes' team. Even if it's just a bit, I should get in some sleep for that sake.

"Sensei, here you go."

At this moment, Agnes offers me her lap. Is she telling me to sleep there since she's going to give

me a lap pillow?

"No, it's okay..."

"Sensei, exactly because it's a nap, it's not good for a child's body to sleep on the hard stone floor. You don't need to hold back. Rather, I'll be happy..."

"Eh? What was that just now?"

"Nothing! Now, come on."

"If you're going to insist on it so much..."

As it's an emergency measure, it's not like it'd count as an affair, so... I try to borrow Agnes' lap while making up the excuse in my mind that there's nothing like that between teacher and student.

Thereupon, Cindy calls out to me, offering me her lap as well, "Sensei, Agnes should be tired from her leader duty. Please use my lap to nap instead."

"Eh? It's not like I'm actually tired or anything..."

"It's going to be fairly difficult from now on, so you have to rest up as much as possible as well, Agnes. Right now you're just not feeling any fatigue since your nerves are still high-strung. You must take a rest now." Cindy returns a sound argument at Agnes who's tried to retort that she's not tired.

Certainly, it's Agnes who's pulling our party right now while standing at the front line. Given that she's essentially the leader, it's probably better for her to rest up as much as she can now. It's not a situation where she can give me a lap pillow.

"Umm, then I'm going to borrow Cindy's lap..."

"E——eh!"

"Agnes, is it something justifying for you to cry out so loudly?"

Our most important objective right now is to escape this ruin. It's obviously smarter to go with the most efficient methods.

"Therefore, I think I'm going to borrow Cindy's lap."

"Sensei, please nap while using my lap."

"Betty?"

At this moment, Betty also offers her lap to me.

"Cindy-chan is the youngest amongst us three. I believe her body and mind should be quite strained as well, and Agnes-chan has a heavy responsibility as our leader. Thus, please take a nap on my lap,

seeing how I've trained my body by hunting frequently."

"Hmm, now that you mention it..."

Betty's opinion makes sense. Seeing that Agnes' team is going to take a nap as well, it's imperative to allow them to recover as much mana and stamina as possible. Since Agnes acts as the leader of the three, she bears a heavy toll, and Cindy is the youngest.

It might be best for me to borrow the lap of Betty, who's trained as a hunter. There's absolutely no way that I'm thinking any such perverted stuff like her legs having been the smoothest with the nicest comfort a while back or anything like that.

Anyway, now that we've decided to rest, I gotta use every second of it to do just that.

As I try to borrow Betty's lap after deciding so, another person joins in, "Earl Baumeister, I am waiting."

"Eh? I wouldn't borrow your lap even if it were to kill me."

What's with that sad idea that I ought to nap on the lap of some old dude. His legs are hard anyway, so I might as well sleep on the floor then.

"I can not recommend you laying down for a short-time nap."

"Oohh! That's what you mean!"

Nothing less of a scholar. He's saying something sounding quite expert, even though he belongs to another field of science.

"This is something I have heard from a specialist in this field, but if you are going to nap for a short time, it is best to sleep while falling prostrate on something like a desk. I am going to do the same as well."

"I suppose you're right..."

Looking at the state of the approaching walls, it seems that I can sleep for around 30 minutes. If the speed of the walls increases after I've laid down, there's the worry that I might be late in my response. Precisely because it's a nap, it's necessary to use logic here.

Even in my previous life I pulled through by napping for ten to twenty minutes on my table after finishing lunch.

"It's just like Arnest says. If I remember correctly..."

I retrieve small desks, including Agnes' team's shares, from my magic bag. You might wonder why I'm carrying even something like this with me, but the capacity of my magic bag is big, so there's actually many items I've stored away in there.

"You girls, feel free to sleep while using these. I'm sleepy..."

This child body...

I immediately fall prostrate on my desk as I'm assailed by drowsiness at a rate that would be usually impossible. Anyway, let's sleep for now...in order to safely escape this ridiculous underground ruin with everyone.

* * *

"He fell asleep. Now, young ladies, you too..."

"Arnest-san!"

I reflexively shout my protest out at Arnest-san.

"Keep it down, Agnes-chan."

"Sensei is sleeping. He's in the body of a child, so the burden is high on him."

As Betty and Cindy caution me about my loud voice, I cover my mouth in a hurry. Sensei has finally fallen asleep, so I mustn't do something as silly as waking him up in the middle of it.

"But, I can understand Agnes-chan's anger."

"Me too."

Us three begin to press on Arnest-san. Certainly, there's some truth to what he's saying, but he doesn't understand one very important fact, namely, our feelings as girls.

"How mean of you, Arnest-san! And here I had thought that I could give sensei a lap pillow at long last!"

I start the attacks against Arnest-san at a volume low enough that sensei won't wake up from it.

I wanted sensei to think 『Agnes' lap is really soft』 while getting him to rest on it with a peace of mind. All for the sake of having him become aware of me as a woman after we escape this place. That was the major point.

"Indeed! You went too far!"

"No matter how much of an old man you might be, your lacking understanding of a maiden's heart is way too extreme!"

Even Betty and Cindy, who follow up next, should have felt the same. Both of them are my rivals so far as it goes, but rather than that, they feel like they need to whip Arnest-san who busted the contest between us.

"That is not the point here. To begin with, it is imperative to make sure that Earl Baumeister does not collapse from overwork."

Uugh! Arnest-san's argument is too sound! He's definitely right here, but us offering sensei a lap pillow at this point shouldn't have posed much of a problem.

"Even though I had planned to gently wake up sensei once it was time..."

For Betty to have come up with something so enviable... I should have realized this as well, and yet I allowed for such a terrible blind spot to exist. After all, his wives and the people in his mansion totally monopolize the enviable option of waking up the sleeping sensei.

What a blunder for me of all people.

Just when I considered Arnest-san to be unforgivable all the more because of this, Betty and Cindy had moved to sensei's side without me noticing. Don't tell me! They plan to appeal to sensei as future wife candidates by instilling in him the image of capable women who'd gently and timely wake him up...

Damn! I was totally beaten to the punch by these two!

"Uuhhh...."

This is also Arnest-san's fault for having destroyed the foundation of my initial plan.

I end up staring at him with reproachful eyes.

"Hmm, little ladies, you need to quickly take a rest as well. I am still not all that exhausted, so it will not be a problem for me. Do not worry and take a nap, I will keep watch."

That's not the issue here, but...still, what Arnest-san is saying isn't wrong.

I decide to take a nap as well, falling prostrate on the small desk. Somehow it's like nodding off during class.

* * *

"It is time, Earl Baumeister."

"U——ugh. I wonder, did my stamina recover a bit?"

"It is just a light reprieve, but it is better than nothing. Around thirty minutes have passed since you fell asleep."

"I see..."

When I open my eyes, the room's walls have approached quite closely. It looks like the walls had no

nasty contrivance of teasing us by suddenly increasing their speed. Since we've had a little rest, all that's left is to destroy the exit with magic and head to the upper floor.

"Agnes, Betty, Cindy, it's time."

I wake up the three girls who've been diligent about recovering their stamina and mana by taking a nap.

"Fuueh...huh? Sensei, you're up already?"

"Arnest woke me up."

"Is that so...?"

"" ... ""

Are they people with a foul mood after waking up? The three narrow their eyes as they stare at Arnest with expressions that are hard to read.

"Now then, I wonder whether this break will prove to have been good or bad luck."

"We will find out after proceeding. You three, we're off."

""""Yes!""""

It'll be easily possible to blow open the exit door when using a certain level of offensive magic. Receiving my order, Cindy faultlessly smashes down the thick door with her magic, allowing us to successfully escape this floor.



"The next area is...water?"

"A pond, swamp."

"A big puddle of water?"

The next floor is mostly filled with water. It's a huge, man-made lake, but as some kind of magic has been cast across almost all of this floor, 『Detect』 doesn't work.

"Hmmm." Arnest seems to have noticed the oddity of this place.

"Is there some kind of trick set up in the water? ...Agnes."

"Okay."

Agnes also tries to probe the water with the 『Detect』 I taught her, but there's absolutely no

contrivance in the water itself. It's really nothing but simple water, so our bodies won't start melting or anything if we go in.

"Earl Baumeister, it is very cold water. In other words, it is the ancient strategy of 『Defeat half a force by having them cross a river』."

"I see."

I touch the water as well, but it's numbingly cold. This underground ruin has stuck to military methods to destroy its invaders so far. The water level reaches up to Agnes' waist, whereas I sink in up to my chest.

That means, it's a trap to unnecessarily make us accumulate fatigue by crossing through cold water.

"Magic is being used to maintain the water's low temperature."

"There's another spell, right?"

The strategy of exhausting the invaders by forcing them to proceed through cold water won't work on magicians. I mean, magicians can cross the water without getting wet by using 『Flight』.

Because the other side likely knows about that as well, another spell should be active on this lake floor.

"Cindy, try floating up with 『Flight』."

"Okay...huh?"

Cindy tries to invoke 『Flight』 at the water's edge several times, but she can't float as the spell is being canceled out. It looks like my prediction has been right.

"In other words, we have to head to the exit while passing through this cold water."

"It can't be helped. It's freezing, though."

"It's kinda like swimming, isn't it?"

"Well, you got to cross rivers during hunts as well."

As expected, that's their level of perception, huh...? Still, the designer of this ruin has been quite evil, and his thought process is clearly that of a soldier. After all he has adopted the steady method of gradually weakening the invaders to kill them in the upper floors instead of the often used method of defeating invaders with powerful golems on each floor.

"It is definitely a nuisance, but it is inevitable."

"Sorry."

"If you were to die, Earl Baumeister, I would not be able to investigate the ruin here. And even

before that, we would die together anyway." With those words, Arnest bends down to carry me on his back.

If I entered this water with my current body, I'd become unable to move by the time we reached the exit.

"How about warming up the water with magic just around ourselves?"

"You'd use up quite a lot of mana until we reach the exit. It's truly a nuisance."

You could probably call it a fortune that no golems have been deployed on this floor. It'll be fine as long we just get through the cold water.

It'll cost quite a bit of stamina, but we've got no choice but to let it recover by warming ourselves up at the exit.

"Hyaaa! It is cold!"

"It's not cold...it's freezing."

"Cold."

"This coldness all the way to the exit..."

Arnest, who carries me, and Agnes' team who are submerged into the water up to their waists, trudge towards the exit with their expressions twisted due to the water's coldness.

And then the demerit of having chosen to take a break on the previous floor catches up with us. The trap on the previous floor has probably been reset. Accordingly, the great number of small dragon golems from the second floor have followed us up to this floor.

"We shouldn't have taken a break..." Agnes has apparently started to regret her previous choice.

"No, if we had continued without resting, we might have used up all our strength on the way through this water. Agnes, your choice hasn't been wrong."

"You're exaggerating. No matter how cold it might be, it's just water."

"It's just cold water, but since it reaches up to your waist, you expend stamina by just walking through it. Moreover, since the water is freezing cold, it robs you of even more stamina."

"This means, either choice would lead to hell."

The creator of this ruin was fully aware just how much stamina would be lost if you walk several hundred meters through numbingly cold water.

"Sensei! Behind us!"

"So they're here."

The dragons have become able to freely move around after the trap on the previous floor was released. Now they have gathered up into a huge swarm. One after the other starts to shoot their breath at us from the opposite shore.

"Arnest."

"I am on it."

A single breath doesn't have much firepower. But, that doesn't mean that you come out unscathed when hit. We have to block them with 『Magic Barriers』 at any cost.

Not getting as exhausted in comparison to Agnes' team since the water is only reaching half way up his thighs, Arnest begins to quickly block the attacks by deploying his 『Magic Barrier』.

"It is an ill-minded trap."

We can only proceed slowly thanks to the water's resistance. Given that we must keep up the 『Magic Barrier』 for an extended period of time, it'll also exhaust our mana in the end.

"Agnes, Betty, Cindy! Leave the 『Magic Barrier』 to Arnest!"

"But..."

"Don't worry! It's a division of roles!"

We cannot afford to have Agnes' team, who can use offensive magic, to waste their mana in this place. I'll have Arnest actively devote himself to defense, seeing how he can't attack golems despite having lots of mana.

"They don't advance above the water, huh?"

"Just like 『Flight』 has become unavailable for us, those dragons can not maintain their floating power above the lake."

Having said that, the water resistance is stronger than expected. We haven't distanced ourselves more than 50 meters from the shore. I didn't notice it since the labyrinth-like structure of the lower floor had many walls, but if the small dragons concentrate on just the distance of their breaths, they seem to achieve quite the range.

They have assembled at the shore, and keep releasing their breaths at us. Arnest has been blocking those, but since the breaths exploded very close to me, who's riding on his back - albeit with the 『Magic Barrier』 in-between - you can't really describe it as a situation that's overly desirable for my mental sanity.

On the other hand, if I were to try walking through the water, my exhaustion would be extreme because of this child body, and I'd immediately become a burden after becoming immobile. It's a setup that drains the invaders to a truly detestable extent.

"Earl Baumeister, it looks like we also have to deploy a 『Magic Barrier』 to the front."

"Yeah..."

I guess there's no way for the creator of this ruin to be so half-hearted. At the shore near the exit, which gradually came into sight, a great number of small dragon golems is awaiting us. Once they caught sight of us, they began hurling breath attacks at us.

"That is what I had thought would happen."

"Betty, please handle that side."

"Okay."

In the end, it's resulted in us continuing to advance with Arnest deploying his 『Magic Barrier』 to the back, and Betty hers to the front.

"It kinda feels like disembarking amongst enemy fire. Just like a military history story I've read in the past."

I think the big difference with the story mentioned by Agnes is us also being attacked from behind. Moreover, embarking amongst enemy fire is something you'd usually do when the landing side has the bigger military forces. You wouldn't start any landing operations with a small party like ours against an enemy with overwhelming numbers. After all, it's ill-advised and very likely that you'd fail. We simply don't have any other choice as we'll die if we don't continue onwards.

"Sensei, aren't we going to raise the walking speed?"

"Cindy, that's unreasonable. You're spending more stamina than expected despite having thought that it's just normal water, right? If we make the mistake of hurrying, we'll be worn out before reaching the shore at the exit. The guy, who came up with this trap, was quite cunning."

If the invaders grow impatient after receiving attacks from the back and front, and try to hurry up, they'll lose too much stamina, and use up all their strength then and there in the worst case.

"I think the next floor will be the most dangerous one so far, if the ruin does not manage to bring down the invaders on this floor."

"Most likely."

It's because the invaders would have used up lots of mana and stamina on this floor.

"The ruin just has to kill us, the invaders, in the end. That's the kind of design it is."

If it was a normal underground ruin with traps and challenges, they'd have placed trump cards on every floor, but this place has many traps with the sole objective to tire us out mentally, and steal our mana and stamina. The traps have been set up with the idea that we simply need to croak in the end.

"That's why it's the design of a soldier."

"Did someone like a strategist, appearing in military history documents, come up with this?"

"Considering the scale of this place, it might be a military installation of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era, so it might have been created by someone well-acquainted with military affairs. Or maybe a genius who had such knowledge." I replied to Agnes.

"With that said, don't mess up your pace. Panicking will just play into the cards of our opponent."

We keep proceeding forward while being showered by breath attacks from the front and back. The breaths can be blocked with 『Magic Barriers』, but accordingly, Arnest and Betty keep using up their mana.

"No matter what you choose here, it's full of demerits! The person, who thought up this ruin, was truly malicious!"

"I'm pretty sure he was someone with a very sinister look!"

"His personality was the worst!"

It's just as the girls say. If it comes to such an ill-spirited ruin of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era...Count Ishrubak again? It's very likely, I think.

As we advanced while enduring, we could confirm that several dozens of small dragons were regularly firing breath attacks at us from the shore near the exit. They're acting just like an artillery battery.

"Sensei, the attacks from the rear have stopped."

Did we leave their range? No, the small dragons of this ruin move just like military forces. They're probably making sure that the shots missing us don't hit their allies in front by mistake.

"Arnest, the 『Magic Barrier』 in the back is no longer needed."

"Yes. The yellow girly is going to have it tough from now on."

Arnest, at least remember Betty's name after you've gone through all this together with her! Calling her yellow girly because of her hair color...this is why scholars are such a pain.

It's great that the breath attacks only come from the front now, but the dragons have accordingly raised the attack speed.

"Jeez, they're so weirdly smart!"

I guess that's the final, fierce attack against us who intend to land on-shore.

"Sensei, should I attack them?"

"Betty...you can't pull that off right now, can you?"

The feat of opening a hole in a part of a 『Magic Barrier』 and attacking through that opening can only be done by veterans at Burkhart-san's level.

"Now that you mention it, you're right."

"Hence, push your way through all the way to the exit just like that, Betty."

As long as she keeps up a 『Magic Barrier』 of a certain thickness, we'll be able to reach the exit even without attacking the dragons.

"It's better to not waste mana than imprudently attacking."

I guess you could call it lucky, but as we get closer, we can identify the details of this floor's exit. It seems to be a huge iron door with a height of around five meters. If we succeed in reaching the other side of that door, we should be able to cut off the dragons' attacks.

"Push!"

Having safely reached land at the exit, we continue walking towards the exit straight away.

"Huh? I can't run."

"My legs..."

"I can't move..."

Figures. They've been soaked in water that has been cooled down to almost freezing point.

I can understand the theory behind it, but actually experiencing it myself is really harsh." Even Arnest, who has offered less surface area for the cold water in proportion to his tall height, has apparently suffered quite a bit from this cold water hell.

His walking pace is slow as well.

I think it'll be quite bad if we don't take a break after passing through the exit...

"We're going to rest once we pass through that door!"

""""Okay!""""

"I really want to take a break. Also, is that door one you open by pushing or pulling?"

The chance is 50-50.

If it's a door that has to be pulled, it should pose quite the trouble for us - with me being a child, Agnes' group young girls, and Arnest being a scholar type. Pushing aside the fire-breathing dragons with a 『Magic Barrier』, we finally arrive at the exit door.

"Arnest, check it."

"Very well."

I have Arnest examine the door. Meanwhile Betty redploys her 『Magic Barrier』, dealing with the dragons' breaths.

"So?"

"It is a push door."

"Huh? That's unexpectedly kind of the designer."

"That is no more than a pipe dream."

The four of us, except for Betty, try pushing the door at once, but it doesn't budge in the slightest due to its excessive weight.

"In short, we have no choice but to increase our strength through magic, deadhead Earl Baumeister."

"Shut it."

Indeed, as a child with an elementary level of mana I'm completely useless here.

"Can't-use-offensive-magic Arnest, reinforce your strength to the limit with mana and push."

"I have told you many times over, I am a brainworker."

"So you're going to die as one?"

"Okay, okay, I will push."

"I will help out as well."

"Me too...arg——h, I should have invested more time into practicing 『Body Strengthening』."

Arnest, Agnes and Cindy continue pushing for dear life while boosting their strength through mana in order to open the iron door blocking the exit. However, because their base strength is rather low to begin with, the door doesn't move at all.

Having said that, it's not like I've currently got much more strength than them either. Even if I were to help, the effect would be negligible, and my mana would likely run out quickly since I don't have much of it. Replenishing mana with spare magic gems is simple, but sadly I would probably collapse right away, unable to bear the mental strain with this child body.

I can't do much more than cheering the three on.

"Sensei, how much longer?" Betty, who has spread her 『Magic Barrier』 in a semicircle with the door as focal point, is showered by the concentrated fire of the dragons who have assembled.

As her mana consumption ought to be quite intense, I'm sure she wants us to open the door as quickly as possible.

"Let us push with all power!"

"Now's not the time to talk about saving mana!"

"Here I go!"

The three drastically increase the mana they're using, causing the door to finally start moving bit-by-bit.

"We just got to open it wide enough so that we can get out of here!"

"I know!"

The three are probably expending quite a bit of mana there.

Once they somehow manage to open a gap allowing one person a time to pass through, we jump through it one after the other.

"Naturally, we have to close it again, don't we?"

"Otherwise they're going to follow us."

Hearing my reply, Cindy reveals an openly dejected expression.

Next, the work to push the door shut so that the small dragons don't come after us begins. Betty blocks the door with her 『Magic Barrier』, preventing the dragons to slip in through the gap.

"Ack! Stay outsidee——!"

Deploying a 『Magic Barrier』 in an unfamiliar shape is a heavier toll on mana and mental force than one would expect.

"We are almost there!"

"Heavy!"

"Ugh!"

The three look pained as they push the heavy iron door. Just like during the opening, it consumes a lot of mana before they finally manage to close it.

"Phew..." Having no need to keep up the barrier any longer, Betty flops down on the spot while sighing.

It's the same for the other three. However, at the same time we can continuously hear loud banging from the door's other side.

"Everyone, please get away from the door."

"Sensei?"

"What, I'm just going to plug it up."

Indeed, I've now understood why the door has to be pushed to open up. Even if the intruders succeed in running away, the small dragon golems can still pursue them by pushing the door.

In that case, I've got an idea of my own as well.

I take out heavy rubbish from my magic bag, piling it up high in front of the door.

"This should keep them away for a while."

"Eh? This much is only going to last a while?"

"Agnes, you think the designer of this ruin hasn't estimated that we might do this?"

My prediction might be correct. The loud banging sounds at the door have increased in number. Moreover, the door has started to move, albeit very slowly, in spite of me having blocked it with this many heavy items. The only explanation would be an increase of the dragons on the other side.

"It is the same as with the previous wall trap. Once we broke through it, the trap not allowing 『Flight』 above the pond has disappeared."

In other words, right now a huge mass of the dragon golems, which keep spawning endlessly, has gathered in front of the door, pushing against it all at once.

"That's why I said that we'll be alright for a while. Rest up while we still can."

"But, we have to go on as soon as possible."

"That's impossible with these legs, isn't it?"

They've been walking in numbingly cold water while soaked up to the waist. Moreover, they've pushed the door with all their power. Thus it's impossible for them to walk normally with their trembling legs and loins.

"All of you, take off your boots and socks."

"Eh? Expose my feet? If possible, I'd like to do that when we're alone..."

"Come on! I'm serious here! Cindy, Betty, Arnest, you too."

Agnes might actually be a girl with lots of superficial knowledge about sex. Isn't she resembling Ina a bit in this?

I start warming up their feet with a spell similar to a 『Heater』, applying fire magic. I have to at least remove the freezing cold from their legs. Otherwise they won't be able to walk, let alone run.

"It's warm. Sensei, is this fire magic?"

"Yep."

"This is a difficult spell, isn't it?"

"It is."

At the very least I doubt that the girls will be able to use it at this point in time. To lower fire magic to the limit so as to reproduce 『Warm』 and not 『Hot』 requires magic precision beyond a certain level. If someone unskilled at magic precision tries this, they'll definitely cause scalds.

I've become capable of doing this after practicing it. With the stress of this spell being on magic precision, it doesn't need much mana, which is great for me in this situation. Seeing how I've become a burden with my child body, we won't be able to survive unless I provide at least such support.

"How nice." Cindy looks rather comfortable as I'm heating her feet in the same way.

"Sensei, could you please direct it higher up?"

"For me as well."

"Please do the same for me. My waist is cold as well."

Either way, I guess it'll be difficult to continue to the upper floors if I don't get rid of their lower body's undercooling.

"Arnest too. Your legs are cold, aren't they?"

"Magic precision, huh? I am getting my just desserts for having skipped on this so far."

Generally demons have vast amounts of mana at their disposal and thus have no need to use magic precision. It looks like the majority of them don't train their magic at all. That's why it's not strange that Arnest, who's lived for a good while now, can't warm up his own legs either.

Since it'd be a problem if he burned himself by unskillfully trying to handle it himself, it's probably better if I do it for him. To be honest, it's a no-brainer that I'd rather warm up the legs of three young and beautiful girls than those of some old dude, but right now it's for the sake of survival.

"It feels nicely warm. I will leave the question why you do not start a campfire aside, though."

"In an airtight space? The stairways connecting the floors are narrow, as you can see yourself."

"I just asked to make sure. Either way, it is warm."

While at it, I also cast a simple healing spell. After all it'd be a disaster if they got a frostbite. And then I ran out of mana.

"Not having any mana is really harsh."

Since the amount of my mana has only been climbing so far, I didn't care about it much, but now I easily run out of mana if I don't pay attention to how I use it. I quickly replenish it with a magic gem, but a child's body is susceptible to fatigue either way.

I feel that it's questionable whether I'll be able to replenish my mana once more. Even though the gems contain enough mana to refill mine as many times as I want, I can't do that because of the mental fatigue.

The designer of this ruin has a truly nasty character for having anticipated that, and set up his traps so that the intruders can't catch a breath.

"You girls, replenish your mana now. I think it'll get rough from her on."

""""Okay!""""

The three girls and Arnest refill the large amount of mana they spent earlier with the magic gems that have been filled up with mana for times like these.

"This is a lot harsher than I had expected."

As long as you previously poured your own mana into a magic gem, you can recover your mana with it. If you can use healing magic, you can also heal injuries and such with it. However, mental fatigue is the only thing that can't be avoided.

It might be even better if we could take a nap as well, but hearing the frequency of banging sounds on the iron door going up, and seeing how the door itself moves each time, it seems difficult to take more than a short rest. In the first place, it'd be tough to carefreely sleep around in a situation where you don't know when the door might give way.

"Arnest, what do you think? How many more floors are waiting for us?"

"I think the next will be the last one."

"Hoh, I also feel that, but why do you think so?"

"This place is a military installation. I believe it is correct to assess this ruin as place to run experiments with the small dragon golems and various magic technologies, but going by my experience so far, the next floor should be the limit."

"Limit, eh...? You mean because of the budget?"

"No matter the era, money spins the human world after all."

"That's my opinion as well."

Moreover, I've been feeling like we're getting closer to the surface, albeit only vaguely by intuition. It's something like a sixth sense, lacking any grounded basis.

However...

"Because it will be the last floor, it should become a lot harsher than the ones so far."

"We're prepared for that."

Even if the next floor isn't the last, we must proceed onwards until we run out of strength. Once I look at Agnes, Betty, and Cindy, I can see resolve dwelling in their eyes. It looks like today's actual experiences have allowed the girls to grow a lot more than any of the lessons and training sessions so far.

I'd like to allow them to return alive from this, and display today's results after they graduate. After all, I'm their teacher.

"We should go soon."

"Yep."

Having taken a break of around ten minutes, we climb the stairs towards the next floor after seeing how the iron door has been getting warped due to small dragons. If this isn't the last floor, we might possibly get overrun by all of them after reaching our limit, but I keep going upwards while making sure to not think about that as much as possible.



"What do you think?"

"It looks kinda like the last floor."

"Whoaaa, what a big floor."

"Something like a maneuvering ground?"

"The exit of this floor is so far away that you can't see it from here."

We've reached the next floor. I quickly retrieve a telescope from my magic bag, and look for a door that might be the exit.

Oh, I think I've spotted something around 500 meters ahead of us? It looks like a gaudily decorated door. A dragon head has been set up on the wall right above the door, and on top of that, there are

many holes at the wall. After coming all the way here, these holes only give me a bad vibe.

Quietly I hand the telescope to Arnest.

"The dragon head hanging over the exit door hands out the orders and repels the invaders."

"That dragon head does? But I don't think that its breath will reach all the way here." Agnes states her own opinion after looking at the exit through the telescope next.

"Those holes are fishy...aren't they?" Cindy looks at me with an expression that can't be described as anything but having a bad feeling after looking at the exit through a spare telescope I handed to her.

I share her view that those holes certainly don't look like normal ventilation holes. Artificial golems don't need any air in the first place, and even if, there wouldn't be any need to open up a dozen ventilation holes on one wall.

"I'd be happier if you weren't right about this."

"That's an unreasonable wish."

Betty puts on the same expression as Cindy after checking the exit area after borrowing a telescope from me.

Going by the events up until now, I can't believe that the designer of this ruin would make such a blunder.

"It might turn into a battle against time."

"Isn't the idea here that we'll be alright as long as we manage to reach the exit?"

"You should abandon such naive thinking."

"Figures..."

Checking through the telescope once again, I see how small dragon golems pour out of the holes in the wall, heading this way. Given that the eyes of the dragon head are shining crimson, it has very likely handed out an order along the lines of 『Eliminate the invaders!』

""Sensei, give us a strategy!""

"If possible, I'd like you to come up with your own, though..."

Agnes and the other two might soon hit their limit as well. Having said that, now that it has come to this, the usable strategies are limited.

"Arnest will keep up his 『Magic Barrier』 for as long as possible while regularly replenishing his mana."

"I suppose."

We're in a situation where we don't know when the iron door at the lower floor will break down. So we've got no choice but to defeat that dragon head before we get stuck in a pincer attack.

If we defeat that dragon head, the dragon golems should stop coming out of the ejection holes at the exit's wall in front...theoretically. I feel like we'd have big luck if it went as far as them stopping to work altogether.

Relying on Arnest's mana, we will put all our effort in getting close to that dragon head first. Then I'll have Agnes' group destroy the head once we're close enough. That also needs to be done as quickly as possible.

"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.



"Huh? Is this the netherworld?"

""Sensei!""

"Earl Baumeister, nothing less of you, you are quite tenacious."

"I'm going to return those words right back at you."

This time I was quite certain of my death, but it seems that I narrowly escaped such a fate. When I open my eyes, I'm met with Agnes' team and Arnest's faces as they look down at me. If I had really died, it would have been Master's face greeting me now.

In other words, I'm still alive.

"You did well to not have died after having gotten dragged into such an explosion."

Judging that I'd get my priorities backwards if I didn't manage to destroy the dragon head because I had lowered the explosion's output, I used a magic gem for the arrow's tip containing a considerable amount of mana. Given that it was a peculiar method of making it explode, it was inefficient with a rather small firepower when compared to the invested amount of mana, but even so, there was no way that I could have survived after getting dragged into that kind of blast.

And yet, I'm still alive. Strange things do happen every now and then.

"Sensei, you were saved by Arnest-san."

According to Agnes, Arnest flew over with 『Flight』 on the spur of the moment, picked me up, and protected us both by immediately redeploying his 『Magic Barrier』. Still, for Arnest, who shirked his magic training despite having lots of mana, to have been in time for my rescue, even though Agnes' team, who usually never fails to do their magic training, couldn't react at all...

"I think it is proper human etiquette to honestly express a thanks at such times."

"Thanks, you saved me there, Arnest."

"It is nice to see you so upfront about it. I would have been troubled if my sponsor died on me. Moreover, I am very interested in this underground ruin."

I guess he's saying that he might not have been able to investigate this ruin if I had died. Very typical of Arnest, I'd say...

Come to think of it, where are we right now?

When I survey my vicinity, I spot temple-like structures, a stone floor, and stone pillars with dragon carvings. At the least it shouldn't be the floor where we encountered the dragon head.

"That dragon head was completely destroyed. Immediately afterwards, the small dragons stopped working altogether, and the exit door opened up. Right now we're one floor above." Going by Cindy's explanation, this seems to be the highest floor of the ruin we had been transferred to.

That means, just as Arnest and I had predicted, the dragon head was the last boss.

"I see. I wonder, where's the exit?"

"Sensei, it's better if you don't move yet. You're still a child, so you have to take a proper rest." Betty stopped me from getting up while giving me a lap pillow.

However, it's also a fact that I'm filled with the wish to check whether we can get out to the surface as soon as possible.

"While you were sleeping, Cindy and I removed the rubble blocking the exit with magic."

"We're on the first floor right beneath the surface, so we'll be fine."

When the two had checked outside, they found out that we're in a hilly area around ten kilometers to the south of Baulburg. This part of the ruin had been buried in a hill, so it apparently remained undiscovered.

"It is a wonderfully auspicious matter that we have been able to survive, but right now the people of the Earl Baumeister House should be in a frantic uproar. Especially Erwin."

Once he came back after going out for a bit to take a piss, believing that it was a safe ruin, we had suddenly vanished. For Erwin, a retainer of the Baumeister House, this would be a story going far beyond a question of responsibility. About now he might be searching for us while panicking.

"I should contact...ah!"

Only now I remember that I had a MHCD with me in my magic bag. If I had contacted the outside with this, things might not have developed in the direction of us almost dying? Considering it like that, I feel how cold sweat starts to gush out a bit.

"Hmm? Communications? Those should be impossible here, seeing how it is a military installation."

Well, this guy had repaired and used a Communication Jamming Device during the Empire's Civil War, so I guess those things were relatively popular as military technology in the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization.

"Therefore I had not immediately told you to contact the outside either. Earl Baumeister, you thought so as well, no? Or did you possibly not...?"

"O-Of course I noticed it right away!"

I try using the MHCD - ultimately just for caution's sake, of course - but since it really doesn't connect to anyone, I feel relieved from the bottom of my heart.

"It looks like the golems are using another type of Communication Jamming Device."

"So that's why we can't connect to the outside even after the destruction of the dragon head, huh?"
Agnes realizes that his ruin still hasn't completely stopped operating.

I suppose it means there's still a jamming device running in this ruin. We should quickly leave this place since it's dangerous.

I get up from Betty's lap pillow.

"Ah...no..."

"Since we'll be able to use the communication device as soon as we leave this ruin, rescue will immediately arrive, I expect. Let's get out of here as soon as possible."

Deciding to leave any further investigation of the ruin for another day, we crawl out of the ruin. A rescue force immediately comes running as soon as I use the MHCD, thus spelling the safe conclusion of our unexpected life and death struggle.

* * *

"Wend, you survived...but, you're small."

"That Erw sure is oddly whiny."

"Now listen, Wend, if something had happened to you, it wouldn't have ended with only Erw's responsibility being called into question."

"Indeed."

"Milord, I'd like you to be a little more aware of your own importance."

"It can't be helped, can it? It'll be better for your peace of mind to accept that there'll be unforeseen accidents."

"That's what you say, Wend, but it doesn't seem like Erw and Roderich think so as well."

Right now I'm still a child, so I had planned to eat something and go to sleep early tonight since I'm tired, but...

Erw tilted his head in confusion for a moment after seeing me, but then started to bawl as soon as he

grasped that my child state was a temporary state caused by magic. Roderich's preaching was as severe as ever, resulting in me having a hard time.

Going by Ina, around this much should be natural, seeing the magnitude of the incident.

"We're terribly sorry as the ones having caused all of this."

"It's because we carelessly approached that small rat."

"Sorry for having almost caused sensei's death."

Given the situation, Agnes' team is staying the night in my mansion, but it appears that they feel responsible for today's events. The three keep apologizing to Erw, Roderich, and my wives. They probably believe that things would have become really bad if I had died.

"Don't mind it. You approaching the rat unprepared was a bad move, but now you know to be more careful next time, right?"

It's over now, and today's precarious situation allowed the three to grow drastically. As their teacher, I can only say all's well that ends well.

"Beating yourself up over something that's already done doesn't lead anywhere. God is teaching us that 『Failures are the source of future success』. Please do not worry about it."

Nothing less of Elise. She soothes the three to not worry any further. Given that my first wife has said that the three bear no responsibility, everyone besides me isn't able to condemn the three over this case any further. Roderich and Erw also cease speaking of this.

"(Sorry, Elise)"

"(It's because calling their responsibility into question isn't what you wish, dear)"

As expected of her, Elise displays her capability as my first wife, immediately grasping my intent, and dealing with things in accordance to it.

"Still, I must say you've become rather cute, Wend." On top of that, Luise skilfully shifts the topic into another direction.

For some reason she looks very happy as she compares her height with mine.

"Luise is slightly taller?"

"Indeed, Wilma! Right now I'm taller than Wend!"

"It looks like he'll return to normal after one night, though."

Katharina looks like she doesn't get the point behind Luise's cheerfulness, but I think that's likely owed to her being fairly tall herself. In Luise's eyes the fact of winning in height against me, even if it might be for just one night, seems to have value.

"Somehow it reminds me of the past. Back when I had just married into the Knight Baumeister House, Wend-kun was also this small and cute."

"Every once in a while it'd be adorable to have such a tiny Wendelin around, wouldn't it?"

"Definitely."

Because the magic will wear off by tomorrow, and probably out of a happy-go-lucky feeling, I'm treated like a child even by Amalie-san, Therese, and Lisa. They take turns gently caressing my head.

"My personality is still that of a fully-grown adult, though."

"I'm well aware, but thine appearance wakes the urge in me to brush thine head."

"I know, I know."

"It reminds me of my little brother's childhood."

It's inevitable for an adult man to get embarrassed from having his head stroked or being carried around.

"Wendelin-kun, you're happy about getting patted by older ladies, aren't you?"

Damn you, Erw, don't get your revenge on me now, just because you went through a tough time because of me having gone missing. I don't need any of your friggin' teasing while watching me being treated like a child.

"Arnest-san, is His Lordship really going to return to normal?"

"No doubt about it. I have become tired from having used a lot of spells I am not familiar with, so I am going to sleep now."

Arnest has been quietly taking dinner together with us, but with those words, he takes his leave to go to sleep. There were many situations where we narrowly escaped death thanks to him, so he's earned the right to take it easy for today.

"I think I'll go to sleep as well."

A childish body is really troublesome as it easily gets tired. I'll also get some sleep now. Tomorrow I'll be rid of this childish body, too.

"Let's sleep together then, dear."

However, because Elise immediately declares her intent here, the situation plunges into chaos. Elise is pregnant, and I have this kind of body. Of course we won't have sex, but somehow it looks like she wants to sleep together with me.

"E——eh! That's unfair, Elise!"

"But, Ina-san, someone needs to confirm whether Wendelin-sama is truly going to return to normal tomorrow morning."

I should revert back tomorrow morning, but there's still the unlikely event that it might not be so. Elise makes her standpoint clear, saying that she's going to sleep with me for the sake of watching over me.

"I could do the same as well, no?"

"Ina-chan, I don't have any problem doing it either."

"Me neither."

"We should all have an equal opportunity, right?"

"Then I'll join in as well." Katia said.

"All of you are pregnant, so I, as the Head Maid, should officially take care of this."

"Amalie-san, that's a sly move."

"Indeed. Everyone, be honest. Thou just want to sleep with Wendelin now that he's become a cute child, or am I wrong?" Therese drops a bombshell announcement, pointing out the true intention behind the quarrel of my wives.



"You're right. Given that Wendelin-sama's child state is a special occurrence lasting only tonight, I shall watch over him as the first wife."

"That's what you bring up at this point?"

"You're sneaky, Elise. I mean, even I want to sleep together with a Wend, who's smaller than me, while lovingly watching over him."

"I doubt that counts as a reason. Wendelin-sama should sleep with me. Luise, you toss and turn around while sleeping."

"That makes sense. But, that part will be totally okay if it comes to someone as elegant as me."

"Elegance or stuff like that doesn't matter here at all. I sleep peacefully as well, just so you know."

"You shouldn't lie. Katia, you're a bad sleep-talker. I'll take care of this."

"Aren't you all forgetting that you're pregnant? That's why I'll sleep with Wend-kun."

"Amalie, since it's only about sleeping together, I doubt it's an issue. I will handle it in preparation for the time when mine child will be born."

My wives continue to argue while speaking all at once. Or rather, when will I be able to go to sleep? And with whom?

"Wendelin-sama is tired, so I as the first wife will take over this duty so as to avoid an endless quarrel."

"I told you, that's unfair!"

"I'll do it!" Luise exclaims.

"I've got a peaceful sleeping posture."

"As expected, this is the time for the elegant me to take the stage."

"Didn't I say seconds ago that your elegance doesn't matter!? And stop saying that I'm sleep-talking."

"I had few opportunities as a newcomer."

"That's a very convenient excuse! If thou use that as an argument, it applies to me as well!"

"All of you, please go to sleep since it's a bad influence on the children in your bellies. I know the child Wend-kun the best after all."



"Sensei?"

"All of you, you can go to your guest room and sleep now. Good work today."

"Are you going to be okay, sensei?"

"Even though you're worn-out..."

"You three might understand once you become a bit older, but it'd turn into a disaster if I went off on my own to sleep at this point. Please don't mind me, and go sleep."

In the end there was no hint that the dispute of my wives would end anytime soon, resulting in my bedtime being pointlessly delayed. On the next day I got stuck taking a nap because of lacking sleep.



Moreover, I should note that my body had returned to normal when I got up in the morning.