

Extras 451

Chapter 451 Grand Calamity Class Dungeon [Pt 1]

'A dark hole under the ground, huh? Looks like Necromancy.'

That was the first thought on Rey's mind as he saw the bright purple light shine bright and felt an emergence from underneath the floor's surface.

He had seen Ater use the Skill before, so he understood how it worked.

"BRACE YOURSELVES, EVERYONE!" Richard's voice reverberated amongst his fellows, and the many that stood behind him.

"FIRST WAVE INCOMING!"

The Adventurers, at least the sensible ones, tightly clutched their weapons and spread themselves out. They took battle stances and readied themselves for the incoming horde.

Those who could used Buff Skills began to activate them, and the Magic Users swiftly chanted out their Spells.

The air of tension did not vanish, and with loud noise radiating all over, many did not hear the pulsating sounds emanating from the ground.

They felt like chattering—lots of chattering.

The disgusting sound of bone grating upon bone, almost as unpleasant as metal scraping metal.

Those at the forefront heard the sounds clearly, though, and they prepared themselves for the challenge.

Then—

~SHWUUUUUUUU~

—The creatures from beneath began manifesting.

They had darkened white bodies, their forms a grotesque and twisted representation of false life.

Skeletons, animated ones, faced the Adventurers, all of them having some kind of purple glow within their empty sockets.

"T-that is...!"

"No way!"

"Incredible!"

Miasma was associated with Necromancy, so this sight did not surprise anyone.

It was the sheer number that made their eyes widen.

The Skeletons were at least thrice—no, perhaps four times—as many as the Adventurers that stood opposite them.

Some looked like ordinary bony Undead, but others were different.

About one-tenth had normal armor, obsidian black in color. They also had swords or spears in their hands, making them standard soldiers.

Another one-tenth had robes on, and while they had no weapons equipped, it was clear that they had no use for one. Their clattering teeth made it clear who they were and what they were doing.

These were Caster Skeletons.

Yet another one-tenth was dressed with light armor, having arrows in the quiver behind them, as well bows in their dominant bony hands.

These were Archer Skeletons.

Then, there was the last variant—smaller in number than the rest—yet having a much more dangerous vibe as mere individuals.

They had incredibly bulky armor, and their weapons were a lot bigger than the rest.

You could only count about ten of them, and each had distinct weapons that they wielded.

One had a halberd, while another had a long sword. The one beside it had a bastard sword, while the next one had a spear.

It went on like that.

These were clearly Skeleton Knights, at least B-Tier Monsters.

"To think we'd encounter B-Tier Monsters on just the ground floor..." Someone whispered, though no one knew who it was.

In essence, the entire army of Skeletons was about 36,000 in number. fre(e)

3,600 of them were Soldiers.

3,600 of them were Casters.

3,600 of them were Archers.

All of these were C-Tier Monsters, just for clarity sake.

10 of them were Skeleton Knights—B-Tier Monsters—and the rest were mere Skeletons, which fell in the D-Tier Category.

Some thought they belonged in a lesser rank, due to their low offensive abilities.

However, since Undead were rare to come across, and they didn't feel pain, exhaustion, and couldn't really die unless you performed specific actions—in the case of Skeletons, crushing their head—they were ranked higher.

On the side of the Adventurers, there was no real count done to determine their Ranks, but there were only about a hundred Master Rank (5 Star) Adventurers in the City, and about a thousand Expert Ranks (4 Star).

Veteran Ranks (3 Star) were a few thousand, but the majority of Adventurers belonged to the Common and Novice Ranks (2 Star and 1 Star respectively).

In essence, when looking at the total number of Adventurers in the City, and the ones that made it to the Conquest, it was easy to see how clearly outnumbered they were.

'Based on what I can sense, only about three thousand of us are going to be of much use in this fight...' Rey sighed to himself.

The rest were fodder, but that didn't surprise him.

'Older and more experienced Adventurers tend to be more cautious, and they wouldn't throw their lives away on a mission that they aren't guaranteed to win.'

The people that would readily sign up for this sort of thing were ignorant Adventurers or those who were desperate to make a name or fortune for themselves.

Well, arrogant bastards existed too...

'In any case, the stage has been set.' Rey smiled, dropping his briefcase to the ground.

'I could easily kill all of them on my own, but... I guess we have to stick to the plan.'

The briefcase opened on its own, and just by stretching his hand downward, the blade within flew to his grasp.

After that, the briefcase disappeared.

"Cool sword." Noah's voice echoed from beside him.

Rey glanced to his side and saw that Noah had already taken the miniature blade off his neck. It now floated above his hand, brimming with so much energy it felt like the thing would explode.

"I could say the same about yours." Rey added as he witnessed the floating blade manifest even more power.

"Yeah." Noah smirked, ignoring the commotion in front of them both. "A friend gifted it to me."

For a moment, there was silence.

Then—

"Watch this..."

In a single second, the blade grew in size, becoming a katana that he swiftly wielded in no time.

"Cool." Rey smiled at him.

"Cool."

Noah's blade had three effects, and Rey still remembered them till date.

One was to grow and shrink in size in a mere second.

There were two other abilities it possessed.

~FSHUUU...~

The blade turned invisible, even the energy escaping from the senses.

'The second function...'

As soon as he did this, though, the Skeletons started moving, so all attention had to go to them.

'Here they come!'

*

Chapter 452 Grand Calamity Class Dungeon [Pt 2]

"First attack incoming. Brace for projectiles!"

Just as Richard predicted, the Skeleton Archers initiated the attack by firing their arrows high up.

~WHISH!~

Whistling sounds filled the air as the thousands of arrows ascended, only to swiftly descend with even greater force towards the group of Adventurers.

Arrows could be defended against as long as you had the right Skill, armor, or some other sort of defense against it.

Evasion was also possible.

However, a volley of such magnitude was bound to take a lot of lives—especially since it covered such a wide area.

At least, that was how it was supposed to go.

"Lux..."

With a single word from Jet, the white-clad Adventurer nodded and finished chanting her Spell within a second.

Her hands rose up, and a sudden torrent of wind exploded from beneath her.

~VWOOOOOOOMMM!~

With just a single spell, she easily stopped all the arrows, suspending them in the air.

Every Adventurer behind the Heroic Rank Adventurers gawked in both awe and disbelief as they witnessed the amazing sight with their very eyes.

Not only was it incredibly difficult—if not impossible—for a single Spell in such a short time to stop thousands of wide-spread projectiles at once, it just couldn't be done by a single human being.

Perhaps the combined Magic of a group could achieve such an effect, but not a single Mage.

The only person who would be considered capable of such a feat would be Grand Mage Lucielle, and that was because she was probably the only human in H'Trae with an A-Tier Skill and an A-Tier Class at the same time.

She was an anomaly—a genius beyond anything the world had ever seen.

Many considered her the second coming of Jet Zephyr, but since the former dealt in Magic, and the latter was predominantly a Warrior, it was difficult to compare the two.

Still... no other person but Lucielle could have done that. If Lux was capable of such, then there was no longer any doubt about it.

She was on the same level as the Grand Mage of the Alliance!

"I suppose it's time for our counter." Jet muttered, taking his gaze off Lux as he looked ahead at the Skeletons.

"This will be the signal for battle."

Lux pointed both of her raised hands towards the Skeletons, and the suspended arrows suddenly began to move. They shifted and turned by the command of the winds.

In no time at all, all 3,600 of them faced the Skeletons.

"Fire."

The moment Jet commanded this, Lux caused her hands to fall.

And then the arrows followed.

~WHOOOOSH!~

They rained down on the Skeletons, crushing their white bones in an instant.

Of course, a mere three thousand arrows would do nothing to an army of over thirty thousand. The soldiers could fend off the arrows, and their armor was also a solid defense. Casters were more vulnerable, but if they could defend themselves with basic Magic, they would be fine.

The Archers were probably fast enough to evade, and the Skeleton Knight weren't even going to be affected at all.

Plus, since the arrows were shot randomly, most of the damage wouldn't be fatal.

Sure, some Skeletons would lose their limbs, and have several bones broken, but as long as their head was intact, and their mobility wasn't compromised... they could still fight.

But so what?

The descent of arrows wasn't meant to be an attack.

It was merely a signal.

The true storm was only about to begin!

"ATTACK!"

In a ferocious roar, the Adventurers charged forward, behind the Heroic Rank Adventurers that raced ahead—with the exception of Lux.

Her task was to intercept the arrows and redirect them towards the enemy, hence dealing with all ranged attacks that could dwindle their numbers.

"Master Rank Adventurers, take care of the Casters first. If they use Joint Magic, it could be dangerous!" Richard yelled to the top of his lungs.

"Expert Ranks should support them, while Veterans should take care of the Soldier Skeletons."

The Archers had little use in direct combat, so they weren't an immediate threat. Besides, whatever attack they threw would be intercepted by Lux.

"The rest of you... earn your keep and attack the Skeletons."

By some miracle, the stampede did not drown the voice of the Guildmaster. All the Adventurers heard his words and responded with determined nods.

"Let break them into apart!"

"YEEAAAAHHHHHH!!!" The echoes of conquest fueled the electrifying atmosphere, instantly granting a rush of power to those who were ready. fre(e)

Now, more than ever, the Adventurers truly felt only one emotion.

—The desire to fight!

'Well, this is going well...'

The Adventurers were motivated to fight, and so there was hardly any hesitation in their movements as they rushed at the enemy.

There was more than enough room to fight too, so that was an additional advantage.

'The Skeletons are slow, so even weaker Adventurers can land a couple of hits and gang up on them—one at a time—until they win.'

The problem was time.

'Our numbers are just so much smaller than the opponent's. Even if we keep whittling down their numbers like this, they'll eventually get the upper hand.'

Adrenaline was effective, but it only lasted for so long. After its effect was over, the backlash would arrive.

'They'll tire themselves out at the rate they're going now, and once they slow down considerably... the pendulum will swing in the favor of the Skeletons.'

Undead felt no exhaustion or nutrition, which meant they could keep fighting forever.

This tenacity of theirs was what made them very difficult to handle.

'At the very least, they don't have to worry about the projectiles.' Rey smiled wryly, wondering just how many casualties would have been made if Esme didn't save them.

It made sense that he was relieved about that, though he laughed at himself.

'Even though I told myself I wouldn't bother with them... haha, I guess I just can't stand watching people die.'

*

Chapter 453 Grand Calamity Class Dungeon [Pt 3]

Just as Richard ordered, the Adventurers were working on tight formation.

Novice and Common Adventurers were busy fighting against the ordinary Skeletons, while Experts and Masters handled the Mages.

The Veterans had the middle-ground and dealt with the Soldiers.

As for the Heroic Rank Adventurers, their task was already obvious—defeating the Skeleton Knights.

There were a total of six Heroic Ranks, but with Lux taking care of the projectiles, that left only five. No one bothered saying anything to each other, but there was an implicit agreement among them that they would simply take two each.

And so, they marched forward.

~BOOM!~

They easily cleared the Skeletons—no matter what variant they were—in their paths while racing towards the main enemies they had to beat.

Usually, fighting against B-Tier Monsters was something Heroic Rank Adventurers had no problem doing. There were certain tricky ones that could cause trouble, but they were still not too much of a threat.

However, when it came to Undead, especially Skeleton Knights, things were a little tricky.

Monsters usually never wielded Items, and even though some were intelligent enough to use weapons, they usually weren't enchanted.

But...

Undead—especially humanoid ones—were prone to be equipped with Items. The stronger the variant, the higher the chances that they were wielding some incredibly powerful Items.

That strongly applied to the Skeleton Knights.

Depending on the kind of Enchanted Items, and how many were being wielded by one Skeleton Knight, it could be considered an A-Tier Monster.

It was the same way a human with B-Tier Skills and capabilities could end up as a Heroic Rank Adventurer—technically an A-Tier entity.

The supplementary power provided by Items played a very vital role in battle, and just by a single glance, it was clear that the Skeleton Knights were equipped with some high-quality Items.

Their weapons gleamed with danger, and the bulky armor they wore was immaculate.

They were coated in all-black, which sharply contrasted the fading white of their bones, while matching well with the purple sparks in their sockets.

Still, whether B-Tier or A-Tier, it didn't really matter to the Heroic Rank Adventurers.

They were capable of handling any—especially if it was a one-on-one battle.

At most, each would fight two at the same time, which wasn't really feasible considering how spread-apart each Skeleton Knight was.

Perhaps if it was a massively overpowered A-Tier Monster, even one would be an issue. But, a Skeleton Knight was nothing!

... Not to Adventurers of such caliber.

~CLANG!~

The invisible katana of Noah Sherlock easily parried the blow of the Knight that thought it had a clean shot, causing it to stumble back as a result of the recoil.

~ZZZTTTZZZ!~

A burst of lightning soared from his blade, and he threw it like a javelin towards the head of the Monster.

~WHOOSH!~

In no time at all, they were separated. Smoke rose from the corpse, and the smell of cooked bone filled the immediate surroundings.

"Heh!" Noah stretched his hand out, and his blade returned to his grasp in no time at all.

His Katana [Night Blade] had three special functions:

Shrink and Grow

Turn Invisible

Always return to the wielder.

These three effects were further amplified by the other Enchanted Items in his possession—one of which was a ring that infused the Lightning Element on anything he wielded.

He had a bunch of other Items that dealt with other Elemental Attributes, so his blade would remain as versatile as it could possibly be.

Also, since there was such a thing as an Equip Limit, Noah used a smart workaround to subvert his limits.

—Item Supplementation!

By supplementing an Enchanted Item with other Items, making it essentially one Item, you could wield that one Item and it counted as one.

Of course, matters of compatibility were a big factor in this, and it didn't always work, but Noah was able to pick and choose the best kinds of Items that suited him most thanks to the vast amount of money he had.

'It's I good thing I went to KariBlanc and shopped as much as I could before leaving the Capital.'

He could always swap out Items too, thanks to having a few Spatial Rings in his possession.

Anytime his Item ran out of Mana, he could always refill it with supplementary Items or refined Mana Stones.

If an Item wasn't being useful in a certain situation, he could swap it out for better or more useful equipment.

The Items in his arsenal was versatile.

That was his true strength—the real reason he felt confident enough in his ability as a Heroic Rank Adventurer.

Or rather, that used to be the case.

~BOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMM!~

The loud eruption that came from the distance caused Noah to abandon most of his confidence.

The sheer scale of the attack was unbelievable, and it swallowed everything within it in that explosion of light.

It came from a single person.

"Jet..." Noah mumbled to himself as he gazed at the streaks of purple that zoomed all around and about.

Everywhere the purple streak of light went, destruction followed.

"... What a beast."

Compared to Jet's Chaos Blade, which easily cleared so many enemies with a single swing, Noah felt like his own Night Blade was junk. free.c om

He had never thought of his katana in such a way, but any man would feel the same if they caught just a single glance at Jet in action.

He had long defeated his quota of Skeleton Knights, so he was just assisting the battle by getting rid of most of the mobs by himself.

Noah was sure that about a hundred Skeletons were slaughtered by just a single swing of his blade.

They didn't even offer any kind of resistance.

"Now it feels weird calling myself a Heroic Rank Adventurer like him..." Noah chuckled, finding the despair of the situation mildly amusing.

Right in front of him was the display of pure power, and he didn't want to miss out.

'I suppose I'll have to try a lot harder too.'

*

Chapter 454 Grand Calamity Class Dungeon [Pt 4]

'Alright. I've taken care of most of them on this end, so I think I'll go for the Archers next.'

Rey's thoughts were a constant flowing stream, the same as his body, as he darted towards the direction of the Skeleton Archers in the rear.

His blade was in his hand, and he could easily extend it to cut even more Monsters, but he wasn't doing that.

They weren't worth any EXP to him, so he left them for the fodder who badly needed it.

Even his two Skeleton Knights were killed by Esme through her use of the Lightning Elemental attribute, though he made it seem like it was him.

'The goal is to make her stronger. It would be better if she was actively participating in the fight, but...'

Esme had to stay on defense. If she didn't, so many people would die.

'That's why I better handle all the Archers. At least, somehow disable them so she can finish them off and then join the fight full-time.'

There were over three-thousand Archers. He could easily cut them all down in seconds if he used the full power of his [Ascended Godspeed], but for the sake of keeping his power in check, he chose to go with about three minutes.

"Huu... let's go!"

~ZZZTZZZZ!~

He began his race, cutting their limbs so they couldn't fire arrows, and their legs, so they couldn't walk.

EXP went to the one who had the last kill, so all Esme had to do now was strike their heads, and all the EXP would be as good as hers.

'I doubt C-Tier Monsters would do much for her, but in such a large quantity, it should be fine.'

~WHOOSH!~

His blurring body raced past even more Skeleton Archers, disabling them just as easily as before. Other Adventurers were already showing signs of exhaustion, but he really didn't feel anything.

'I'm tempted to end things quickly, at least for their sakes, but no.'

There was a good reason for his caution, even amidst the chaotic state of the current battle.

'I can't discount that Adrien is watching all of this. I can't give him any reason to think I'm Ralyks, or Rey.'

For all he knew, Adrien Chase could be anywhere.

He could be looking down on everyone, watching from a much higher Floor, while all the Adventurers struggled with the mobs.

There was nothing stopping them from being his Undead soldiers, though Rey highly doubted that, given their overwhelming number and the existence of the easier explanation of them being Dungeon spawns.

The fact that this was a strange Dungeon—down to its layout—even caused Rey's previous suspicion of Adrien being responsible for the entire thing, but he quickly dismissed the thought.

'I can't afford to give him too much credit. It would influence my actions too much.'

Overestimating someone was just as dangerous as underestimating them.

'For all I know, he could be pretending to be an Adventurer.'?Hiding in plain sight was a brilliant tactic that he was sure Adrien could utilize.

'Plus, It's not like I can just check every single person's Status Window.'

That would be nearly ten thousand screens of people who were running around. No matter how diligent Rey was, he didn't think he was capable of such.

'It could even be a waste of time, as he could send a proxy or be controlling people to do his bidding.'

That meant he would have to account for Negative Status Conditions when looking at every single person's Status Window, not just stopping at their names.

It was too much! Especially when there was the existence of other possibilities that could be employed.

Hiding in plain sight was just one of many means of observation.

Rey found it unwise to waste his time on that one route, considering how it could lead him to a dead end.

'He'll reveal himself in due time. I just have to wait.'

Three minutes were over in no time, and once he was done with all the Skeleton Archers, he yelled out.

"LUX!"

She nodded in response, stretching out her hands to control the arrows that were suspended in the air, all in front of her.

They weren't just 3,600. No, that would be the number of just one round.

The Skeleton Archers were automated—same as pretty much every other Undead in the floor—which meant they had no ability to learn or make decisions of their own.

They couldn't adapt, so they never broke out of their pattern and kept firing arrows at set interval.

Perhaps if they had a mind, they could have changed their targets a little—maybe firing a bit lower, so they could reach their targets who were now closer.

The smartest option would be to stop firing entirely, especially after the first few rounds of being intercepted.

Unfortunately for them, they had no such capabilities.

They performed their actions faithfully, and thanks to that, there was an absurdly high number of arrows floating in the air—all of which now turned in their direction.

So far, Esme had intercepted nine rounds of arrows.

That was 32,400 arrows in total.

~WHOOOOSH!~

The rain of destruction descended upon the helpless Archers as their bodies were rendered into broken shards.

Not only were the arrows too fast and powerful, thanks to the force of wind behind them, but their numbers were too overwhelming for a mere 3,600 to escape.

To make matters worse, they were also immobile.

Their demise was inevitable.

~BOOOOOMM!~

The hard fought battle came to a close with the victory of the Adventurers.

It lasted a little over an hour, an impressive figure considering the numbers of the enemy. Most of the time was spent in the first half of the fight, but the close was just a speedrun.

Once the Heroic Rank Adventurers were done with their allotted enemies and joined the battle, it was pretty much over.

Still, every single Adventurer had to admit it—without any argument or dissent.

The stars of the battle were none other than Jet and Lux.

There were simply phenomenal!

*

Chapter 455 Grand Calamity Class Dungeon [Pt 5]

'About a hundred died still managed to die, huh?'

Rey sighed as he stared at the aftermath of the battle, feeling the eeriness in the air around him.

The dead bodies of the Adventurers lay strewn on the ground, most of their faces depicting the debilitating fear or shock they faced as they died.

Some had their bodies butchered, others simply died due to a lot of blunt force. A lot of it was also compounded by the Miasma Poisoning.

Despite all the measures taken, though, it seemed casualties was inevitable.

'Nothing I can do about that, I guess.' Rey shrugged, glancing to his comrades behind him.

Most of them had relieved expressions on their faces. Who could blame them?

'Logically speaking, this is the best case scenario that could have come about...'

Having only a hundred die was a far better outcome than the thousands who would have been otherwise slaughtered by the barrage of arrows and the overwhelming numbers of the enemy.

Even the fodder, as long as they were lucky, were able to somehow survive despite most being incredibly useless in the battle.

Back to the issue of the corpses, a bunch of Magic Users were already casting Fire Magic on the corpses, as instructed by the Guildmaster.

They had to burn the corpses to reduce the risk of their comrades transforming to Undead due to exposure to Miasma or some unknown Spell.

'Let's focus on other matters for now...' Rey closed his eyes and sighed a little. 'We should be fine.'

"As you can clearly see, this Dungeon is incredibly dangerous and not for the weak at all. The strong have no time to worry about you, and the weak have no choice but to die."

Right there and then, Guildmaster Richard spelled out the true nature of the Dungeon to the Adventurers who stood before him.

It was a wonder how his voice managed to reach so far away despite him being aged, and the space being so large. Nevertheless, his voice traveled into the ear of every single man and woman in the room.

"Adventurers less than Veteran Rank are advised to turn back here and return. Only death awaits if you go on."

Everyone could see for themselves that the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon was no joke, and so they no longer had to take the Guildmaster's words for it.

They could clearly see how their lives were at risk.

'Even for us strong Adventurers, it's still quite difficult.'

Richard could only imagine how the entire battle would have gone if their total number was even less than they were at the moment.

'If we only account Veterans and higher, we'd only be a few thousand at best.'

About three-four thousand.

No... they would most likely be less.

'The weaker Adventurers definitely had their uses in the just-concluded battle. A lot of them were useless, but they still managed to defeat one or two Skeletons, and hold the fort until we were done on our end.'

What would have happened if they weren't present? The heat would have been greater, no doubt.

'How exactly does this Dungeon operate? The Undead army from earlier... would it have spawned differently if we were fewer in number?'

Richard didn't know. And as long as he couldn't say anything for certain, he had to go with what he currently understood about the Dungeon and arrive at a conclusion.

'The possibility is high that there would be even more casualties as we go forward, but... I'm reluctant to let the weak ones go now.'

What if they encountered yet another horde as they advanced? Perhaps an even bigger army than the one they just faced.

It would be crazy to face them with only a little over two thousand members.

'At the very least... no, I shouldn't think like that.' Richard shook his head and sighed.

'The upper areas should be crawling with far stronger Monsters, so even if there's an army, they won't be able to keep up.'

The Adventurers would just end up dying for nothing.

"The door is right behind you! Please depart now while you still can!"

Despite Richard saying this, the Adventurers remained standing. A bunch of them showed hesitation, but for the most part, none of them seemed willing to move.

'Ahh... I see now.' Richard thought to himself as he stared at the crowd.

The fear in their eyes were inadequate. The tremors from their bodies were insufficient. The wounds that had been inflicted were minimal.

'These people... they still want to continue despite everything!'

The experience just now frightened them a little, sure, but it did nothing to quell the resolve they had before entering the Dungeon.

'It looks like my plan failed.' Richard smiled wryly, turning in the direction of the prime reason why things ended up this way.

'Jet and Lux, especially the latter. Their existence grants these people confidence.'

Despite him saying that the strong wouldn't protect the weak, it was no lie that Lux shielded everyone from harm during the fight. She blocked tens of thousands of arrows for their sake.

Those barrages would have been very difficult to deal with, and it would have led to at least a couple of thousand Adventurers dying.

The fact that she could protect them then meant they were counting on her to do the same again.

'As for Jet, the fact that he could handle so many Monsters at once, and at such a sheer scale, shows how they ought to be safe from incredibly powerful enemies if those appear.'

Jet and Lux could always take care of the overwhelming dangers while they worked their way up and reap as many benefits as they could.

A number of them would still die, but for the lucky ones, they would end up being incredibly rich and more powerful.

That, to the weak ones, was more than enough reason to keep going.

'What a problem.' Richard frowned a little.

'Thanks to their lives being spared, they have become willing to throw it all away again.'

*

Chapter 456 Grand Calamity Class Dungeon [Pt 6]

'I messed up!'

Rey could already sense the expectations of the audience directed towards him and Esme-- specifically Esme.

'Because of our actions, most of them aren't turning back.'

There just wasn't enough casualties or despair to drive the weak away. For that very reason, many of them thought they had a chance.

'But was I supposed to? Watch as all of them got wiped out?'

If he did that, the number of casualties would have exceeded what the Guildmaster had projected in his grand plan.

Pretty much anyone who was a Veteran would have died.

'That would be an extremely negative blow on the entire Conquest. The Veterans might have chosen to leave at that point.'

Even after the Conquest was over, the deaths of those thousands was bound to negatively affect the Adventurers Guild.

'The Guild earns a certain percentage from the Quest Rewards that Adventurers get directly from them. Also, Adventurers pay taxes too...'

The entire Quest system would also be compromised since there would be a severe shortage in the number of low-ranked Adventurers to take on low-ranked jobs.

Higher-ranking Adventurers would never want to want to take on those jobs since the pay would pale in comparison to the Quests that existed normally in their purview. Not only that, but their pride as higher-ranking Adventurers wouldn't let them stoop so low.

If this imbalance festered for long enough, many more problems would rear its head.

'The only way the Guild can combat things by then is to raise the reward of those missions on order to make them appealing to the top Adventurers.'

It would solve the immediate shortage problem, but what of in the long run? Not only would the Guild be losing a lot of money due to this additional incentive they were providing, Adventurers would see that they could earn a sizeable sum with less risk by going for low-ranked Quests, so they would stop doing more challenging and dangerous ones.

That would, in turn, make the high-ranking Quests suffer a severe lack of manpower.

'The only to combat things at that point would be to increase the incentives on the high-ranking missions as well, which will just bring about the same issues and continue the vicious cycle.'

Rey, of course, considered all of these factors--along with the fact that he didn't want any unnecessary deaths--which was why he intervened in the fight.

Or rather, he told Esme to.

'I wonder what she would have done if I didn't say anything. Did she also consider the long-term effects of their deaths, or was she willing to adhere to the original plan?' He had no idea.

What he knew for certain, however, was that his deep consideration now had severe consequences since the weaklings were now deciding to stay.

'If I had [Absolute Mental Control], I would be tempted to use it on these people, but sadly I do not.'

He did have [Compulsion], but that was an A-Tier Skill, and it only worked on one target at a time. Rey figured it would be weird, and even incredibly unrealistic, if he went around and used the Skill on every single Adventurer.

Many would pick up on it quickly.

'Besides, I really shouldn't use any Skill beyond my persona's skill-set.' He told himself.

It just seemed like they would have to endure and carry as many as they could onto the next stage, and probably the one after that.

'I can't let them all die later on after bothering to save them here...' He sighed and shrugged.

While Rey couldn't blame the Adventurers for seizing the opportunity of a lifetime by relying on the more powerful to protect, something about the situation left a bad taste in his mouth.

It felt as though they were using his kindness against him, and they were being pathetic leeches who simply wanted to gain all the benefit while making others work extra for them.

'Esme had to pause her Level-Up grind for these people, yet they expect her to do it again and again while they gain EXP...'

It felt so annoying that Rey was tempted to speak his mind in front of everyone present. He wanted to thoroughly rebuke the crowd and, even if it was by force, make them leave the Dungeon.

But...

"It's fine. Let's just keep up with it for now."

... Esme's voice came from beside him, like a soft whisper entering his ears.

He turned in her direction and found her smiling softly while nodding. It was at this moment that he realized that Esme must have also been thinking about the issue, and she noticed his displeasure on the matter.

'Calm yourself, Rey. Don't get too worked up.' He told himself, allowing his racing heart to mellow out.

"I'm fine now. Thanks." He smiled at her, and she nodded, pulling out a thumbs-up.

He chuckled almost immediately. 'I shouldn't have thought her that...'

"Well, since everyone has decided to continue the Conquest..." Richard's voice brought Rey back to reality, and he gazed at the older man ahead.

To his surprise, the Guildmaster looked in his direction. He made a sympathetic look, and Rey shrugged almost instantly.

'Let them do what they like.'

That was his final conclusion.

Whether he chose to save them or not depended on the situation.

"... We shall now advance forward!"

After picking up the loot and storing them, the group returned to formation and began to march towards the massive stairs.

The ground floor didn't seem to have any doors or openings that led anywhere, so it was presumed that they had to ascend. Of course, it was possible that there were secret entrances around, but given the fact that they were still unsure of the other areas of the Dungeon and how long it would take to clear them factor, they didn't have the time to check.

Rey and Esme stuck close together, since they were partners, but they still didn't stray too far away from the rest of the Heroic Rank Adventurers at the front.

With everyone's heart hardened for the challenge to come, they could never have predicted what came next.

... None of them could!

*

Chapter 457 The Mass Teleportation Incident [Pt 1]

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

That statement, or quote, could not have been truer for the Adventurers who marched forward, unaware of their fate.

The man who led them, Guildmaster Richard, stood at the forefront of the entire group, with the rest of the Heroic Rank Adventurers a step or two behind him.

Everyone else carefully moved in accordance to the ones who led them—like sheep, lambs to the slaughter. Their measured movements meant nothing.

The moment the Guildmaster placed one of his legs on the stairs, making the first attempt to ascend... everything changed.

~VWUUUSSH!~

That single step forward caused a torrent of energy to instantly engulf the room, and a massive Magic Circle, unlike anything the world had ever seen before, instantly shone from below the unsuspecting Adventurers.

All of this happened in a mere instant that no one had any chance to react.

Before their bodies could fully comprehend the surge of energy, or their eyes fully capture the intricate patterns of the giant Magic Circle, it was too late.

~SHIINGGG!~

The bright purple light that glowed from the complicated lines and drawings in the formulae burned bright, drowning everything within the room in its power.

Just from that single step, every single soul in the area was affected, and their bodies all vanished at once.

Their journeys, to whatever destination that the light took them, was all started by the Guildmaster's step.

And, in a twisted way to keep the poetic statement true, the old man has also vanished as well.

Everyone was gone.

Well... almost everyone. For amidst the remnant mist from the incredible energy that just burst forth, there were two who stood beside each other—completely unaffected by the displacement.

One had a black hat, with his suitcase in hand, while the other wore a white hooded cloak with blue and gold designs strapped around her Adventurer Outfit.

Yes, the only ones left in the vast room—standing right in front of the stairs—were Jet and Lux.

Or rather, Rey and Esme.

"W-what just happened...?"

Esme's confused voice echoed in the air as she looked around her in shock. One second, she was looking at the stairs, surrounded by people in all directions, and now she was all alone with Rey.

The Guildmaster was gone. The Heroic Rank Adventurers were gone. Everyone... was gone.

Why...?

"There was a forced mass teleportation. I could only briefly experience it all, so it makes sense that you don't understand."

From the way Rey was speaking, it was clear that he was bothered. No, more than that, he was worried.

"Forced teleportation? Everyone was taken away? To where?"

"I don't know!" Rey slightly yelled, a lot of suppressed frustration bursting out through his voice.

It startled Esme for a moment, and he realized that almost instantly.

"S-sorry..."

"No, it's fine. I just want to understand what happened."

To Esme, she indeed felt a surge of energy around her, and it seemed like a flash of light flashed before her eyes, but that was pretty much it.

The sensation didn't properly register in her brain since it was too fast to capture. Her Level and Stats were pretty much on the high end compared to other Adventurers, so she found it a little worrisome that even she could only see so much.

No one could have reacted to a flash that fast.

No one but Rey.

"We would have been transported as well, but thankfully, I activated my [Absolute Spatial Domain] and it worked just in time." Rey sighed. "You were the closest to me, and the only one I could cover in such a short period of time, so I did that."

Despite being the only one to act, and the fact that he was able to save her, Rey didn't look very satisfied.

"If I wasn't so flustered, I would have first of all activated my Buff Skills and given myself increased perception of everything."

With [Ascended Godspeed] he could have been more than fast enough—both physically and mentally—to save everyone.

Not only did he get this Skill by combining all of Snow's Skills into one, he also fused all of Fernand's Skills—particularly regarding the ones that improved his perception and speed.

All of those, combined with Rey's incredible Stats, would have made him capable of acting a lot faster.

"I was just too slow in my judgment. It all happened so fast that I instinctively reached for [Absolute Spatial Domain]..."

"I-I see..."

Esme's voice was a little low, and she didn't know what to say to Rey at the moment.

She could tell why he would be frustrated.

'His friends were among the ones who were teleported away... including the girl he has feelings for.'

None of them were sure where they went to, but Esme could make a pretty good guess.

'They've probably been scattered around the Dungeon.'

This wasn't particularly the first time a Dungeon Trap was seen transporting people to separate locations within the same space. Nothing of this scale had ever happened before, but based on precedent, it was sensible to assume that they were taken to another part of the Dungeon,

'I'm sure Rey recognizes this as well...'

Chances of his friends and his special someone being harmed by the teleportation were low. However, it was a different situation when considering the aftermath.

Everyone was randomly transported to various parts of the Dungeon... but where?

What if they were taken to the most difficult areas, and worst of all, they were isolated? Would even a strong individual be able to survive.

'What if that happens to Alicia...?'

Esme realized that Rey must have been having these thoughts, and they had to be driving him crazy.

That was why she couldn't help but be silent for a while.

"This Mass Teleportation..." Rey finally spoke up, looking at Esme with eyes reminiscent of someone boiling with pure rage.

There was no semblance of kindness or concern on his face, and only vestiges of anxiety could be seen there.

There was only the display of wrath.

"... I think Adrien is behind it!"

*

Chapter 458 The Mass Teleportation Incident [Pt 2]

Rey was pissed.

No, that felt like an understatement compared to what he was feeling at the moment.

His friends and allies were all gone, and he couldn't do anything to save them. All his classmates were also caught up in it.

'Alicia too... DAMNIT!'

The rage swelling from within him felt like it could explode him from within.

He hated how he was feeling. He knew he was being extremely insensitive to Esme, who was most definitely still confused about the whole thing.

But... he couldn't stop mulling over everything.

'What was that, though? A Dungeon Trap?' Rey wondered to himself.

If that was the case, then it made a lot of sense. This would be the first time something of this scale had happened—since such traps usually only transported one person or a small group—but that didn't discount the possibility of a much bigger trap.

This was a Grand Calamity Class Dungeon, so something of this scale had to be expected.

Yet... Rey wasn't satisfied with that explanation.

If it was a trap, then that meant there was no rhyme and reason to its effects. The Dungeon just reacted to their presence and used one of its defense mechanisms.

Plain and simple. But...

'It can't be that simple!' Rey found something gnawing at his heart.

He was tempted to leave things as they were, instead focusing on saving everyone, but he couldn't ignore an explanation that was rising from within his depths.

'Adrien! Maybe he... no, not maybe. He has to be the one behind this!'

Everything that had happened thus far couldn't have just been coincidences. Rey had tried his best to consider how they could all be natural, but this was the last straw.

Perhaps he was seeking out patterns where there were none.

Maybe he just felt so frustrated that he needed some 'living' entity to vent on, rather than the automated 'Dungeon Defenses.'

It was even possible that he was being illogical and unreasonable.

BUT—

"This Mass Teleportation... I think Adrien is behind it!"

—Rey didn't care any longer. He already knew Adrien was behind this, one way or the other, so something of this scale could also be attributed to him.

"What do you mean Adrien?"

Despite faintly hearing Esme's question, he was too immersed in his thoughts to offer a coherent response.

'But why? What could he gain from doing this?' Rey gnashed his teeth as he considered the possibilities.

'Is this just one of his games? How will this benefit anyone? How will it help the cause?'

No, perhaps this was never about benefiting humanity.

This was merely just Adrien selfishly doing what was going to be beneficial to just him.

'Even if thousands die in the process...'

There were no Floors here. Just rooms that Rey considered 'Zones.'

'If Alicia, or anyone I care about, gets trapped in a Zone that is a lot more dangerous than they can handle... maybe a Boss Room or something, then...'

His heart thumped loudly as his eyes turned bloodshot. With his fists clenched, the air around him began to quiver.

Everything shook tremendously.

"... I'll KILL him!"

At this point, his gaze happened to reach Esme, whose face seemed to be pale with hints of fear and disbelief.

Her body was vibrating, almost as if it was being shaken by an invisible force.

'H-huh...? What?'

At that moment, Rey snapped out of his dark thoughts and stopped the intense bloodlust that was being released from him without his knowledge or control.

Once he did so, Esme gasped very loudly, almost as if she had been deprived of air for so long. She collapsed to the ground and fell on her knees, gasping even more.

Rey saw this, and his raging heart instantly melted.

"I-I'm sorry, Esme!" He swiftly apologized, rushing close to her until he knelt.

Before he could reach her, she raised a hand and stopped him.

"I-I'm fine. Don't worry..." She slowly raised her head, and streams of tears were falling from her eyes.

That went on to break Rey's heart.

"I'm so... so sorry."

"I know you are. But..." She placed her two hands on his shoulder, gasping for more air while panting very loudly.

"... Don't you ever do that again!"

Her gaze seemed dangerous, almost like she was warning him.

Rey had never seen Esme so mad at him before, but it seemed like she genuinely was upset for his action; something that he completely understood.

"Do you understand?"

Rey slowly nodded his head, causing her to sigh very loudly.

Esme raised herself up, though staggering a little once she stood. Her pale face had recovered, and she wiped the tears on her face away.

"My philosophy makes me consider anyone who may hurt me an enemy. You're dangerous, Rey, and I already knew that..." She looked at him as he picked himself up from the ground.

"But I never considered you a threat to me. That's why I don't see you as an enemy."

Esme's moist eyes that glistened with clear blue felt like diamonds carved from the sky. It felt exquisite, yet distant.

"I don't want that to change, Rey. I don't want to think of you as an enemy, or someone who could hurt me."

"I'm not an enemy, don't worry! And I won't hurt... you." Rey instantly recognized how false his words seemed in light of his recent actions.

Yes, he didn't know what he was doing. However, if there was a chance that an unconscious action of his could hurt her, didn't that make him dangerous?

"That's why I said don't do it again." She said with a small sigh. "I know you didn't mean that."

"Y-yeah... thanks."

Rey's head shamefully hung on his shoulders as more worrisome thoughts burdened him, almost to the point of being overwhelmed.

Then, he felt a warm hand rest on his shoulder.

"There's no need to overcomplicate things with useless thoughts. Whether or not Adrien is behind this, the most important thing right now is saving everyone."

Rey raised his head and saw Esme's smile. That look she gave him, devoid of fear and full of hope... it saved him.

"So are you coming with me or not?" Esme stretched out her hand and nodded invitingly at him.

There was no way Rey could refuse now.

"Yeah! Let's go!"

*

Chapter 459 The Mass Teleportation Incident [Pt 3]

[Moments Earlier]

~VWUUUSH!~

Adonis found himself standing in a vast, dark room.

Just a moment earlier, he was standing among the upper echelon of Adventurers, only for an overwhelming amount of energy to surge forth and a Magic Circle appear.

He had seen the Magic Circle clearly, and at that moment nothing but sheer surprise took over his body. His instincts told him to run—escape to the farthest of locations—but there was nowhere to run to.

He could only stand there, helpless, as he looked to the people who stood beside him.

The only people capable of making any movements besides him—Jet and Lux.

Sure enough, there was movement from their end—from Jet, at the very least.

He could see a surge of energy emanating from him; the Spatial kind.

The air around him warped, and the intense energy that filled his and Lux's surroundings seemed too unreal for mere humans to achieve.

'I'm sure that was at least an S-Tier Skill!' Adonis furrowed his brows.

Unfortunately, he couldn't read any of the finer details, or even act in any capacity, before he got transported to the dark room where he currently occupied.

'Damnit... I was too careless!'

Clenching his fist, Adonis felt rage swirling from his insides.

'To think those Dragon Spies would use such a large-scale Spatial Magic... I never imagined such a scenario.'

Jet and Lux had behaved well for the most part, even assisting the Conquest tremendously. Their acting was so convincing that he would have bought it if he wasn't so sure about the events of the future.

But, they did enough to let his guard down.

'I wasn't expecting that they would make their move so soon.' Gritting his teeth, Adonis admitted that to himself.

It was his mistake.

There was a chance that this was a mere Dungeon Trap, since that wasn't unheard of—though nothing of this scale—but after seeing the evidence of Spatial Magic around Jet and Lux, there was no way he could consider any other explanation.

Even if he didn't catch them in the act, they would have still been his primary suspects. After all...

'This never happened in the previous timeline. There was no Mass Teleportation reported by the survivors.'

This was a new development—another alteration to the timeline.

'And what else is a new development? The participation of those two in the Conquest!'

These elements gave his conclusion perfect coherence, with everything tying itself up in a catastrophic string of logic.

'Yeah. There's no doubt on my mind.' His frown deepened as he stepped forward.

It had to have been them!

'To what end, though? What do they hope to achieve?'

Adonis felt foolish for even thinking to ask himself that question. They were clearly planning on exterminating everyone—including him—in this Dungeon.

"Violence and destruction are the two basest characteristics of Dragons." Adonis spat in rage and disgust.

Rising above those feelings, however, was concern—specifically towards his comrades.

Of course, he was worried about everyone else, but when considering the grand scheme of things, his classmates were the most important.

Not only were they the closest to him, but they were the biggest threats to the Dragons, and humanity's only hope in its fight against them.

It wasn't just him, but the world, that needed them to be safe.

"Right now I have two missions..." His eyes glowed golden and his energy began to spark all over his body.

"First, save as many people as I can—especially my classmates."

Adonis unsheathed the blade strapped around his waist and coated it in condensed light.

"Second, I'll eliminate those two."

Adonis could no longer risk it and wait. Jet and Lux were both immense threats to humanity, as well as immediate threats to the Adventurers and his friends.

For the sake of everyone, he had to kill the both of them.

"... And fast!"

[Meanwhile...]

~SWOOSH!~

Richard swiftly moved, much faster than most youths could even dream of imitating, as he slashed through a horde of Undead Monsters—Greater Zombies—who swarmed around him.

"The hell...!"

The world around him was dimly lit thanks to the small fiery lamps that were hung on the four corners of the relatively vast room.

It wasn't nearly as large as the Ground Floor, but the place was still absurdly huge, with old stones making up the floor, walls, and ceiling—just as in the Ground Floor.

Richard had no idea how he appeared here, but the moment he did so, he was bombarded with the joint assault of the Greater Zombies that lurked in the room.

His instincts told him to fight. Even if he couldn't comprehend what was happening, as long as he didn't want to die, he had to keep fighting.

As he swung his blade and allowed invisible slashes spread around the area, causing incredible damage to his targets, he couldn't help but grit his teeth and wince.

With heavy breaths, he jumped from the crowd and used his only Magic Skill [Stone Magic], to sink the ground beneath him so that the Zombies would get stuck there.

Fortunately for him, [Greater Zombies], while being B-Tier Monsters, had no Active Skills. They just had incredible vitality and troublesome regenerative capabilities.

Their strength was also nothing to discount.

Thankfully, though, his [Stone Magic] attack was successful, and just as one would sink into wet cement, the dozens of Greater Zombies fell right in.

~WHOOOSH!~

Twisting in the air, he found a way to avoid the sinking ground and landed just a few meters away from the only exit door in sight.

'I should escape now. There's no point facing so many of them at once!'

It was better to leave the room and hopefully regroup with another, or multiple Adventurers—hopefully Heroic Rank ones.

'I was probably forcefully transported here. Those stairs... it has to be a Dungeon Trap!'

The Guildmaster sighed, almost mortified that he had been so careless.

'I didn't even sense anything or notice it.' His thoughts trailed as he approached the exit and pushed his hand towards the door.

'I just found myself he... re...?'

As soon as Richard touched the door, his body froze and the entirety of his mind trembled.

'T-this...' His eyes bulged as tears of blood proceeded out of them.

'W-what is THIS?!'

*

Chapter 460 The Mass Teleportation Incident [Pt 4]

The Mass Teleportation Incident transported an approximate number of 9,700 Adventurers to multiple Zones within the Grand Calamity Class Dungeon.

Within this massive structure, there were hundreds of Zones—nearly a thousand of them. Counting the corridors and other areas that would not qualify as a Zone, there were probably a few thousand potential locations for the victims to appear.

Accounting for the number of victims, which was much higher than the available locations, it was inevitable that some people would end up getting transported to the same location.

This selection, as was the case with the entire Mass Teleportation, was totally random.

That meant Party Members were split up from one another, and Solo Adventurers were forced to be among people whom they would normally not interact with.

Weak Adventurers were mixed in with strong ones.

Strong Adventurers were stuck with incompetent buffoons.

To make matters worse, each Zone was a different area based on the random difficulty of the Dungeon, so weaker Adventurers could be summoned to extremely dangerous Zones, while powerful ones could end up in the most uneventful place.

This randomness... it was fatal for the Conquest.

Merely a few hours after the Mass Teleportation Incident occurred, nearly two thousand Adventurers had already died.

Based on that number, and the progressive difficulty of survival in such a horrid place, it was only a matter of time before everyone was wiped out.

Everyone... without exception.

'We've been lucky so far...' Thought Jake, as he walked alongside members of his newly formed Party.

None of them had no choice but to work together if they didn't want to die.

Their teamwork still left a lot to be desired, but they had somehow managed to survive this long despite most of them being Common Rank Adventurers.

Only Jake and one other were Veterans, and that wasn't nearly enough to survive in such a dreary place.

As his dark hair sat on his worried face, and his brown eyes flickered, he swallowed hard. He couldn't help but worry that this 'Luck' that his Party had would soon run out.

The air in the dungeon hung heavy with an oppressive stillness, broken only by the distant echoes of the adventurers' footsteps.

Jake and his Party walked through the narrow corridors, their armor clinking softly with each step. The torchlight flickered, casting eerie shadows that danced along the cold, damp walls.

As they turned a corner, the torchlight revealed a chamber bathed in an otherworldly glow.

A congregation of skeletal figures emerged from the shadows, adorned in tattered robes and brandishing ancient staffs.

'M-Monsters!' His eyes bulged.

And these weren't mere Monsters too...

Undead mages, their hollow eye sockets glowing with an ethereal light, began chanting in unison.

'N-no...'

The atmosphere thickened with an intense energy that sent shivers down Jake's spine.

The adventurers drew their weapons, a mixture of anticipation and fear etched on their faces.

The leader, a seasoned warrior named Sir Roland, barked orders to the party.

"They're just Caster Skeletons, and not too many of them. Attack quickly before they're done!"

Casters had less defensive capabilities, so even if they were C-Tier Monsters, even a Common Adventurer could beat one, if he acted quickly.

Added to the fact that they had all Leveled Up a few times already, they were a lot stronger than before. They could have already surpassed the previous assessment given to them by the Guild.

And so, with all of this in mind, the clash between the living and the undead commenced.

Jake, a skilled Rogue with agile movements and a keen eye, darted between the swirling signs of Spells and skeletal Casters.

~WHOOSH!~

His dual daggers glinted in the dim light as he struck with precision, dispatching the weaker undead with swift, calculated moves.

Everyone followed suit and dispatched the Casters before they could finish their Spells.

All seemed well.

But... Jake couldn't shake off the negative feelings within him.

That feeling of dread that told him that all was not well. Perhaps it was his instincts, or just paranoia.

The Dungeon proved it to be the former.

~WUUUUSH!~

Just as the Party was about to advance, the true threat emerged from the back of the chamber—a towering figure in a tattered cloak, a Lich.

Jake's eyes, just as with everyone else, widened beyond what should be considered normal.

'A-A Lich...?!'

It had just emerged from the darkness on the ground, and even now the black energy swirling around him overwhelmed the room.

A Lich, just like a Death Knight, was an A-Tier Undead—the epitome of Necromancy.

~ZZZTTTZZZZ~

The Lich's skeletal fingers twitched, and arcane energy crackled in the air.

A wave of Dark Magic surged through the room, freezing the adventurers in their tracks.

There was no need to cast a Spell, or to wait for delayed activation.

The effects were instant... and they were brutal.

"G-guh...!" Sir Roland's eyes widened as he fought against the invisible force, but it was futile.

The undying magic gripped the party, rendering them immobile.

More Undead Mages closed in, seemingly out of nowhere, casting spells that sapped the life force from the adventurers.

Desperation gripped Jake as he sliced through the skeletal horde, but the relentless assault continued.

Sir Roland, his once-proud armor now tarnished and weakened, fell to his knees as the Lich's malevolent laughter echoed through the chamber.

"Heon dhadh oouend wiwu wu!" the Lich hissed, its voice resonating with the weight of darkness.

No one understood a single word it said—not that they could, even if they wanted to.

Jake surveyed the battlefield and found out the truth.

His companions lay motionless, drained of life. All of them, without exception, were dead.

"Eeeeeek!"

Just as he had suspected, their luck had run out.

Fear clawed at him.

"Uuuu... uwaaaahhhhh!"

He was beginning to regret his decision to continue with the Conquest despite his instincts telling him otherwise.

'I should have gone! I should have left when I had the chance!'

Just how many people had these very thoughts in their last moments? How many felt the regret and pain that Jake felt now?

Probably all of the Adventurers who died after the Mass Teleportation. Even Jake's allies, before their inevitable demise, must have also felt it.

The raw... overwhelming feeling of regret.

Yet, despite these rabid emotions and rabid sensations, a fire burned within.

He had to survive, if only to carry the memory of his fallen comrades.