

Descent 721

Chapter 721

Leonel didn't have an answer to his question. And, unsurprisingly, neither did the dictionary. But, Leonel didn't mind. Even if this ring led to a dead end, he could still accept it.

Leonel knew that Variant Zones only appeared when a world was on the verge of collapse. According to Kaela, Valiant Heart managed to use a treasure they earned participating in the Morales family's Heir Wars to maintain this Zone and continuously benefit from it.

Other than these facts, everything else was too variable to make any conclusions on. So, Leonel didn't waste any brain power on things he knew he didn't have enough knowledge to reach a logical conclusion with.

Instead, Leonel stood and began to make his way to Valiant Hall.

...

"Hello, I'd like to take a look at the training rooms you have available."

Leonel soon found himself on the second floor of Valiant Hall once again. In fact, he could even see some black belts getting ready to take their own Exams and the receptionist he spoke to was the very same dead-eyed man whose disposition hadn't changed a single bit.

Without a word, the man pushed a booklet to Leonel.

With a quick look, Leonel realized that the training rooms of Valiant Hall were different from the ones you might find on Hero Peak.

Rather than having specialized rooms, Valiant Hall had their training rooms separated into grades. The grades decided the intensity of the setting within the room, or more accurately, the range the settings could be used within.

Though Valiant Hall was less specialized, and also more expensive to use, it made up for it in convenience. For the current Leonel, they were actually quite perfect.

“I’ll take the S-grade Training Room, then.” Leonel decided.

There were three grades below this. And, unfortunately, the grades above this all require elder or equivalent status. So, this was the best Leonel could do.

The receptionist looked at Leonel. The prices were very detailed, so he didn’t believe that Leonel hadn’t seen them. A single day cost 1000 merit points, and that was only if you used the simplest functions of the room like weight training or target practice. If you planned on using anything more special than that, the points would quickly rack up.

Yet, Leonel hadn’t hesitated.

It seemed that this receptionist with a dead look was quite the recluse. There were very few who didn’t know of Leonel’s wealth by now. It was almost amusing that he was surprised.

...

Leonel took a deep breath, standing at the very center of a spacious room.

The S-grade Training Room looked almost identical to the Exam room. It, too, was constructed of large meter long and wide tiles, each of which was a perfect in between for white and black. And, it also happened to be in the shape of a perfect cube. ρ???(???????)

The only different aesthetically was that the S-grade Training Room was a hundred cubic meters large while the exam room was only 20.

Leonel waved his hand forward in a command gesture. Without much lag, a hovering control panel appeared before him, filling his eyes with fascinated lights. He was once again certain that this level of Force Crafting was beyond Valiant Heart. But, now that he knew that these things came from the Variant Zone, it was all easier to accept.

‘First things first, I need to work on my body’s flexibility. Let’s see...’

Leonel had already decided on this long ago. Having a Metal Body was great, but he had noticed during his run-in with the Oryx that his body movements were growing stiff.

If things continued like this, his Lineage Factors would end up restraining one another rather than complimenting each other.

His Snowy Star Owl Lineage Factor should have given him great speed. But, if his joints became a rate limiting factor, then what good would that do him?

The good news was that there should be a solution to this. The Morales Clan’s Metal Body, a Lineage Factor they relied upon to reach the top of the Dimensional Verse, wouldn’t have such a glaring weakness. At least not so early, anyway.

The bad news, though, was that while Leonel’s father had left him any and all techniques he would ever need with regard to Force Crafting, when it came to matters of actual combat, he abandoned his son completely.

Leonel could almost imagine his father cackling somewhere far off in the universe, his feet up on a table and a grin on his face, watching his only son struggle.

Why his father had done this, Leonel had no idea. But, if there was anything his father was good at, it was being really stubborn about arbitrarily drawn lines. If he wasn’t like that, Leonel probably wouldn’t have spent his whole life thinking that his mother had abandoned them.

Leonel still had a shred of luck left, though. At the very least, the dictionary didn’t leave him hanging this time.

Dealing with the stiffness of his body was all about taking a pre-emptive approach. The immediate aftermath of a breakthrough in Metal Body would leave the metal Essence he had absorbed in a very malleable state. While it was like this, it was the best time to lay the foundation for a more flexible body.

Thankfully, Leonel realized this issue early on, or else he might have great problems to deal with later down the line.

Not wasting anymore time, Leonel opened the technique library.

This was a second benefit of using a Training Room in Valiant Hall. Members of Valiant Hall had access to the techniques of all peaks as long as they paid for it with merit points. Though the price here was more expensive than if Leonel went to each individual Peak. It was once again matchless in convenience.

Leonel soon found what he was looking for. And, not long later, he used the help of the dictionary to decide what the best choice was. However, his face couldn't help but twist when he realized what it was.

He really wanted to cry tears but had none to shed. His hand hovered above the screen, twitching.

[108 Rising Suns]

<Description>

<Supplementary Yoga techniques for [36 Setting Suns].. It is advised that these techniques be practiced by the 'Moon' partner so as to avoid possible injury. Only in this way will you maximize your 'Sun' partner's *rise*>

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Leonel closed his eyes as he pressed the accept prompt. He felt as though he was losing a portion of his innocence forever. No matter what, he couldn't let Aina know about this, or he wouldn't ever be able to live it down.

Everything only got worse after the technique was projected to Leonel.

As one might expect, [108 Rising Suns] had exactly 108 positions, all curated to ensure that a sun did indeed rise. The issue with all of this was that Leonel would have to be the one to complete all of them.

'Fuck it... It's not like there's anyone here to see this anyway.'

So, Leonel began. With the help of the training room, not only was the technique projected to him, but there was even a live model to follow. At the very least, watching the model going into such poses was far better than watching Leonel himself do it.

The poses began innocent enough. The first few were nothing but normal stretches. What was special about them would be the fashion by which Force was circulated and used to supplement these positions.

Due to this special use of Force, Leonel found himself sweating just by trying to touch his toes or twist his back.

Things only got progressively worse from there. By the end of it, Leonel was folded into a pretzel, his ass sticking up high into the air and his face flushed completely red, soaked through completely with sweat.

The good news was that by the time he got to pose 108, he was far too tired to even consider how embarrassing his poses were. The bad news, however, was more of the same. He might have to kill anyone who saw him like this.

Leonel collapsed into a star fish position, his lungs gasping for breath. How could he have ever thought that an exercise created for the sake of sex would be so grueling. Was sex this demanding?

Leonel shivered.

At that moment, Leonel realized something quite uncomfortable. He looked below only to see that a certain rod was standing completely at attention.

'...'

'Dammit.'

It seemed that the use of Force wasn't so innocent after all. This damned exercise was meant to stimulate him like this?

Leonel looked up at the ceiling, his dick throbbing and no Aina in sight. It was then that he realized according to the dictionary, he had to do this twice a day for at least a month to get the lasting results he wanted.

In fact, he would have to maintain this regimen for as long as he was in the Fourth Dimension as he would likely have to find another for the Fifth.

'Is this what they meant by absolute power corrupts absolutely? I haven't even gotten to absolute power yet, though...'

... p[unclear]

Several dozen minutes later, Leonel's loins finally managed to calm their fire. Of course, a harsh and cold shower helped volumes with this. Luckily, this training room also had this available.

After Leonel was finished, he ordered a meal and practically inhaled it all before getting back to his training.

'Now that this flexibility nonsense is out of the way for now, we can focus on what really matters.'

Leonel was quite excited for this. He felt that his body was lighter and more powerful and explosive than it had ever been. And, that was just after one round of [108 Rising Suns]. Now, he was ready to put it into use.

There were a few things Leonel wanted to do.

For one, his spearmanship was far too basic. As of now, all of Leonel's attacks were of the simplest variety that might be taught to a child who had just entered a dojo. The only 'spear' technique he had was [Call of the Wind], but that was technically a modified archery technique. Ironically, he never used it with his bow.

By now, [Call of the Wind] was too weak for Leonel to use in battle so he never did. It was more worth it to use simple and straight forward attacks. But now, he finally had the time and the funds to use real techniques.

The truth was that [Call of the Wind] wasn't weak. It had be a C-grade reward, which made it about a Tier 3 or 4 technique. Leonel could use it effectively even now.

The main issue was that after modifying it into a spear technique, it became even weaker than that. And, Leonel had a poor Wind Elemental affinity without Little Blackstar by his side, so he found it to be more of a hindrance than anything to his marksmanship.

What Leonel wanted to do now was clear, then. He wanted to look for a few spear techniques that would suit him and give him more powerful explosive strength.

After he did this, he definitely needed to find a few bow techniques that suited him as well. As of now, he was only using the things he learned from Merlin's Trial. And, though they were good and quite many in number, they ultimately lacked the one hit strength Leonel was looking for. If not for this, he wouldn't have been forced to run from the Oryx.

Beyond this, Leonel would throw his focus into creating new Mage Arts around his Metal Body and Mage Core synergy.

As for things like movement techniques, Leonel already had one he was very fond of and suited him perfectly. Even up to now, he still hadn't unearthed all of its potential.

The final things Leonel thought he might as well look into would be Styles and, maybe most importantly of all... Leonel wanted to see if Valiant Heart had anymore resources that might help him understand how to utilize his Dream Force just that much better.

As much as he seemed to despise Valiant Heart, if not for them, he would still be using normal Soul Force as opposed to the much more powerful Dream Force. Leonel felt it was about time he see through to the true potential of his Dream Force.

With that thought, Leonel opened up a panel of spear techniques.

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Leonel soon realized that these techniques got very expensive, very quickly.

The yoga technique he had just bought only cost a few hundred merit points. But, these Tier 7 and higher spear techniques Leonel was looking through all cost several thousand at the cheapest, there also weren't a small number that could only be counted in the tens of thousands.

However, if others could afford it, for Leonel, it was nothing more than a drop in the bucket. In fact, the only reason he was thinking of the expense now was because of Aina. She had never spoken about how expensive these places were to use, and Leonel was pretty certain that he had a good grasp on her merit point situation.

'I guess I'll just have to give her a bunch next time I see her.'

Leonel shook his head and began to focus.

He not only needed a technique or maybe techniques that could fit in well with his affinities, but he also needed them to not clash while being used with a potentially two headed spear.

Leonel's most powerful weapon was his Quasi Silver double headed spear. It would be a shame if he was in a tough enough battle to be forced to bring it out, only to find out that he couldn't use it to its greatest potential.

Immediately, Leonel eliminated all spear techniques that didn't align with his affinities.

From what Leonel could see after this, there were many spear techniques usable by those with Fire Elemental affinities. Almost too many.

In contrast, there were only a handful that could be used with his Light Elemental affinities and only three he found had Star Elemental affinities as their root.

This made sense. After all, the rarer the affinity, the less likely one would be to find techniques for it, especially when you were looking for the use of a specific weapon. Not only this, but they also became many times more expensive.

However, what was odd was that Leonel didn't find even one Earth Elemental technique. To put that into perspective, he did manage to find one Space Elemental spear technique.

'Is it difficult to make an Earth Elemental technique with the spear in mind?'

Out of curiosity, Leonel checked through all the Earth Elemental techniques Valiant Heart had, only to find that it wasn't just rare for the spear, but for weapons in general. It seemed that it was difficult to translate the Earth Elemental into combat techniques if a weapon was involved.

'... I see...'

Leonel made a mental note of this and moved on. The Earth Element wasn't known for its attack prowess to begin with so Leonel had never expected to choose a technique with it in mind.

The moment he had laid eyes on the Space Elemental spear technique, he knew he had to have it. Even though it cost 90 000 merit points, an amount that wasn't small even to him, it didn't matter. Leonel knew that it was the perfect technique for his double sided spear. If used in conjunction with his Divine Armor, he could truly be undefeatable, especially on a battlefield.

Without hesitation, Leonel snatched it, adding [Vanishing Blade] to his arsenal.

Then, he turned his attention to the Light, Fire and Star Elemental techniques. ρ??∪??????

From the light, he chose a technique worth 30 000 merit points called [Harmonic Spear]. From the fire, he chose two techniques worth 17 000 merit points combined called [Infernal Cyclone] and [Meteoric Impact].

As for Star Elemental techniques, Leonel decided that of those available, none suited his style very well. He believe that [Meteoric Impact], [Infernal Cyclone], [Harmonic Spear] and [Vanishing Blade] would all synergize very well and flow immaculately in battle.

However, the Star Elemental techniques were all focused on heft and weight.

In Leonel's opinion, the Star Element was about more than just its weight. However, these techniques were rather crude despite how expensive they were. If Leonel ever wanted a Star Elemental spear technique, he would either have to make one of his own, or join an organization with better spear techniques than Valiant Heart.

Leonel took a deep breath. With a thought, a gorgeous silver spear appeared in his palms.

The moment it did, it was as though it wanted to fight against Leonel, causing him to grin.

'You're quite arrogant for a spear. But, you fighting against me like this is exactly the training I need right now. Keep going.'

The double headed spear was three meters long, dwarfing Leonel in size. Though at the moment it was impossible to see with the naked eye, Leonel knew well from just a touch that it had the capability to split into three segments.

'Let's begin with the foundation. [Meteoric Impact].'

Leonel held the trembling silver spear out with one arm, watching the motions of the live model with an intent gaze. There wasn't a single twitch of the muscle or shift of Force that he missed. Without leaving out a single detail, he reflected it in his Dream World.

Leonel split his mind 30 ways, having had even more improvement recently. He assigned each to a crucial point of his body, having it entirely focus on reflecting the technique to absolute perfection. Then, using his infallible memory, he etched the feeling into his very being.

[Meteoric Impact] was split into four stages of mastery. The first was the 'Large Rock' stage. The second was the 'Small Rock' stage. The third was the 'Sand' stage. And, the final was the 'Ash' stage.

This technique was all about focusing explosive fire power into the very tip of one's spear. By following this unique flow and making use of perfect timing, one would be able to unleash an explosive assault capable of doing devastating harm.

Without Leonel having to say anything, the training room understood his need and manifested the forms of several large rocks.

With an explosive step, Leonel erupted forward, his spear streaking forward like a piercing meteor. On its tip, a whistling shield of flames flickered.

BANG!

The spear tip collided with the massive rock before him. In one moment, the rock trembled, and in the next, it shattered, exploding outside into numerous tiny shards.

In his first attempt, with a spear that didn't want to listen to him, Leonel immediately crossed the 'Large Rock' stage and entered the 'Small Rock' stage in a Tier 7 technique.

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'You really don't want to listen, huh?'

Leonel chuckled as he looked down at the spear in his hand. If the elders of Valiant Heart knew he had such a treasure, who knows how they'd react. They'd probably, rightfully, get a bunch of satisfaction out of the fact Leonel couldn't control it very well.

By Leonel's estimation, if not for his spear fighting back against him, he would have been at the Sand stage at worst, destroying the rock into fine dust particles. Unfortunately, he didn't manage to reach that threshold.

But, Leonel was fine with this. Mastering these techniques posed little to no difficulty for him. He hardly had to try, he just needed to perfectly copy what he saw before him and use his ability to replicate it. If he wanted, it would take no more than two or three strikes to reach the Ash stage. Without his spear fighting back, it would almost be too easy.

Of course, Leonel had this training room to thank for this. At the same time, he got the idea for a new ability.

Just then, he had decided to split his mind across his body on a whim, just trying to make sure the technique was fine tuned. But, he hadn't expected the feeling of absolute control it gave him. In that moment, Leonel felt that even if he wanted to control how fast his heart beat, he could do it.

'I'll store this at the back of my mind. I'm sure there are many potential applications...'

Though Leonel thought this nonchalantly, what if there was one day he could split his mind trillions upon trillions of ways, allowing him to fine tune every cell of his body...?

Of course, Leonel didn't even know if such a thing was possible. He was already at the peak of the Fourth Dimension with his mind and though he was still incrementally becoming stronger in this aspect even without breaking through... There couldn't be much more room for growth, right?

Leonel shook his head and focused once again.

...

A wheel of fire whistled through the room. Leonel's hands passed over one another, his twin bladed spear shifting from side to side as it spun at impossible speeds.

Sweat beaded down Leonel's face, but the cold look in his seemed to freeze the air.

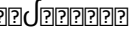
SHUU SHUU SHUU

Rolling wheels of fire shot out from Leonel's spear, rolling along the ground like death traps bearing down on an enemy.

They smashed everything in their path to the ground, exploding them into fine dust upon contact.

Leonel spun his spear around his waist, the speed of its spin accelerating as an arc of fire shot through the air. It looked as though a wheel of flame followed every spin, encasing Leonel in a gyroscope of endless red-black flames.

'Explode, explode, explode...'

Every rock Leonel came up against was immediately blasted apart, sending bits and pieces pelting around the room. 

The strength of [Infernal Cyclone] was undeniable and it was more relentless than [Meteoric Impact], albeit much more difficult to control. But, this was to be expected for a Tier 8 Black treasure.

[Infernal Cyclone] was built on the back of this wide sweeping and spinning spear technique. It only became more potent when two blades as opposed to just one were involved, making it perfect.

Of course, it was much better when there were multiple enemies to face, but this was exactly why Leonel hadn't chosen it as his only technique.

In terms of stages, [Infernal Cyclone] didn't have any. Rather, it had move stances. These were broken down into the 'Forward Spin' and 'Reverse Spin' which could be broken down into many iterations that didn't need to be explained.

What was important, though, was that when mastered to a certain degree, these wheels of flames could jet out from the spear, leaving devastation in their wake. This was considered to be the ultimate form of mastery for [Infernal Cyclone] and one Leonel was still having trouble controlling.

His accuracy was a bit off, and the wheels weren't as compact and powerful as he would like. But, he felt like he would grasp it soon.

...

Leonel took deep heavy breaths. A strong golden light resonated around him, making him seem particularly holy as his hair danced about.

Leonel swept his spear forward. His actions seemed to be particularly slow. Yet, somehow, his spear left afterimages in its wake. These afterimages were so clear that they almost appeared to be the real thing.

Leonel shifted his feet, sweeping his spear backward and using its second blade to pierce forward.

The images layered atop of one another, making it seem as though Leonel's blade was twice as long as it truly was.

This was the [Harmonic Spear] technique. It emphasized two things: Speed and trickery.

The afterimages were so clear because Leonel was using his Light Elemental Force to reflect perfect images of his spear. At this level of mastery, they became so clear that they were almost indistinguishable from the real blade.

When this illusion was layered with the speed of the technique, it made Leonel look as though he was moving slower than he really was. In battle, this trick of the eye would prove to be deadly.

While one might think that Leonel was still a meter from them...

BANG!

Another rock shattered. But this time, the result was so devastating that the dust didn't settle quickly. Rather, what looked like black snowflakes slowly drifted to the ground, making it look like some eerie winter wonderland.

When supplemented with Light Elemental Force, Leonel felt that his spearmanship was more than twice as fast as usual, more than three times, in fact. With [Harmonic Spear], he felt like a god amongst men.

[Harmonic Spear] was also formed into stages. But, unlike the others, it didn't have a cap. It was entirely dependent on the number of after images you could sustain at once.

Though Leonel felt like sustaining dozens wasn't a problem for him. He felt that it wouldn't be useful. Nine was about optimal for the opponents he would be calling enemy very soon.

Once he managed to integrate these three spear techniques into one, and then layered [Vanishing Blade] on top of them... Even Leonel anticipated the kind of strength he would be able to display.

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An arrow streaked across the training room. Exploding pockets of air hovered like a halo around it for just a moment before it shot by.

If one looked closely, though, this 'arrow' seemed to be far too large to have been shot out of the bow of a normal human. It was encased in a Force that made its weight and substance far more substantial.

The moment it impacted against the opposite wall, tearing a path through several prepared stones, the training room shook and quaked.

Leonel slowly put his bow away. He had put this room through a lot in the past several days, he was surprised it hadn't collapsed yet.

Of course, he had no intention of holding back. After everything Valiant Heart had put him through, maybe destroying a few training rooms would be the best way for him to get some payback.

Shaking his head, Leonel began his second round of yoga for the day.

Leonel was very surprised by how much these yoga poses were helping him. Without exaggeration, if he had to pick the single best technique he had learned during this partial seclusion, it would be [108 Rising Suns].

It wasn't the most powerful, obviously, and it couldn't be applied directly in battle. But, the benefits it gave to Leonel as a whole couldn't be understated.

Leonel felt that his coordination was through the roof. At the same time, his speed and even his strength had taken a tick up. The more limber his body became, the less work Leonel had to put in to fight against its limitations, and thus the more direct and efficient strength he could apply.

From Leonel's estimation, a small tick up in flexibility caused sweeping changes through his body, especially since Leonel was a person with high levels of coordination to begin with.

All of this should have made Leonel very happy. But, the reality was the opposite of this.

Of course, this unhappiness had nothing to do with the embarrassment of the poses. Leonel had long since gotten over that. Rather, much more seriously, it put a big problem of Leonel's into perspective.

This time, Leonel had been able to pick out a facet he could improve in and fix it. However, what about next time?

Leonel wasn't Aina who had an intuition about how to best train her body. Leonel had to deduce and often guess at everything. Never in his wildest dreams did Leonel believe just adding some flexibility to his body would cause such wide, sweeping changes.

This led to Leonel being stifled by a fear of missing out. What if there was some other simple method he hadn't quite grasped just yet? What if there was some important training method he should be starting now to set a foundation for the future he was completely unaware of?

Toward such a thing, Leonel could only sigh. Dedicating one of his split minds to always pay attention to his body's state was about the best he could do in the regard. ρ??ϕ??????

Finishing up his exercises, Leonel took another cold shower and engulfed an entire family's worth of food before turning his attention back to the control panel.

At this point, Leonel was quite satisfied with his gains. He had learned four spear techniques, one excellent bow technique, and he even had the framework for several new Mage Arts being configured and tested in his Dream World even right now.

For now, Leonel decided against choosing a Style. After looking through all of them, Leonel didn't find any that were truly worth it. Though those Styles seemed extremely powerful when he first learned of them in Brave City, months removed, Leonel realized that they weren't much different from parlor tricks.

Leonel found that shifting his state of mind to use these Styles was a hindrance to his optimal battle state. And, splitting his mind to maintain them would still, likewise, be hindering his best self.

Leonel was a cold and calculating warrior. He meticulously broke down his movements and that of his opponents into countless numbers a very rare few could understand. However, none of these Styles were quite like that. And, those that were seemed like cheap knock-offs of something Leonel could do on his own better.

So, Leonel ignored Styles for now, deeming them to be a waste of time. Instead, he turned his attention to everything Valiant Heart had on Dream Force, his eyes lighting with excitement.

If this went well, he might very well be able to bring his ability to a new level.

What was unique about Dream Force that set it apart from every other Force type was in the fact every living thing with a consciousness had it. It might have appeared in very small quantities in most people, but that didn't change this fact.

What made those with Dream Force affinity special was that they were able to use this unique Force in large quantities. These individuals could be considered to be 'hyper aware'. They had minds that worked on a different level than everyone else.

When Leonel began to delve into the world, he truly began to learn something new.

Within the Dimensional Verse, abilities weren't as random as Leonel once thought. Though there were always instances of unique, uncharted abilities popping up here and there, most abilities could be separated into defined categories and graded in very specific ways.

This grading system was known as the Ability Index and it was widely accepted. It was likely due to a comprehension of the Ability Index that Arte was so easily able to decipher that Leonel had a sensory type ability!

For example, take for instance the Ability Index of Telekinetic individuals. These people were separated into four categories based on the strength of their ability.

The first level was called Control. The second level was called Strength. The third level was called Amplification. And, the fourth and last level was known as Sublimation.

There were countless individuals born with Telekinetic abilities, but most of them fell into the weakest 'Control' category.

As one might expect, then... Those with Dream Force related abilities also had their own Ability Index and were likewise separated by strength.

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Leonel's eyes brightened. This sort of systematic categorization was exactly what he was missing!

Leonel had long since abandoned his stat reading habit because it would often throw him off in the midst of battle. Without understanding a person's Lineage Factor or Ability, doing something like reading their stats would only handicap himself.

But, this Ability Index was a completely different story. If he could grasp an understanding of it...

Leonel smiled, making a decision to memorize the entire Ability Index when he had the time. But first, he would have to focus on himself.

Leonel turned his attention to Dream Force.

The first level, Opening. The second level, Awakening. The third level, Visualization. The fourth level, Control. The fifth level, Manifestation.

The fifth level in particular, had a red underline, causing Leonel to sigh.

The reason this Ability Index existed was obvious. But, it was also a guide to follow on how to improve one's ability and what path to follow. In a lot of ways, Leonel wished he had known about this Ability Index long ago.

The issue was, according to the legend, this red underline meant that this evolution was impossible to reach unless one was directly born with it. It was an Ability almost exclusively awakened by Savants and no one else.

Obviously, Leonel wasn't even close to touching this fifth level and he never would. That said, he could remember a certain Savant who had done exactly that.

Leonel shook his head.

The first level, Opening, was a subtle awakening of Dream Force. This gave one added thinking capacity, greater memory, faster thinking speed and higher intellect. This was considered to be the lowest level.

The second level, known as Awakening, was a level where the user was more aware of the existence of their Dream Force. This allowed them everything gained on the first level but with an added sensory perception. This was also the minimum requirement necessary to absorb and utilize Dream Force actively.

The third level, Visualization, allowed one to utilize Dream Force to recreate objects in one's mind and simulate reality. This was where consciousness became almost tangible and real, allowing one to control vivid Dreams to insanely high levels of detail.

The fourth level, Control, went beyond this. At the lowest level, it allowed one to control one's mind and sensory perception, raising it and dulling it as one pleased. At the highest level, one could take hold of their consciousness to manipulate every aspect of their body even to the smallest level.

The fifth level, of course... didn't need to be explained.

Within each of these levels, one could be given three grades of proficiency. If Leonel had to grade himself, he believed himself to be at third grade of the Visualization level. In fact, he believed that he had taken a half step into the Control level.

This Ability Index really put things into perspective. There were always those out there who were better.

Leonel seemed to be running through all the talents no matter where he landed, but... wasn't that only natural? This was a mere Fifth Dimensional world whereas his father, at the very least, was from a Seventh Dimensional world. ρ???(?????)

If Leonel really wanted to see where he measured up, he would need to first face geniuses from those high level worlds. If he came out unscathed, only then would he be able to hold his head up high.

As of now, Leonel was just bullying those who had a much lower starting platform than he did.

'The Ability Index is adjusted depending on where you can display your optimal strength. Obviously, any Seventh Dimensional existence would be able to display their ability's highest level on a Fourth Dimensional world. But, whether they could do the same on a Seventh Dimensional world was a completely different matter...'

Right now, Leonel's ability was considered to be in the Peak of the Fifth Dimension. However, it was only being fueled by Fourth Dimensional Dream Force and his Third Dimensional existence.

'Oh...'

The deeper Leonel read, the more he realized that it seemed he had underestimated himself.

Leonel had mistakenly believed that since his ability was in the Fifth Dimension, it was thus already at a Fifth Dimensional standard. As such, the fact he could Visualize Fifth Dimensional matters was normal.

However he was wrong. Very wrong.

The foundation for everything was which Dimension you were in. By still being in the Third Dimension, Leonel was handicapping his own ability by unfathomable levels.

This was a difficult concept to understand. After all, Leonel's mind and body were both in the Fourth Dimension. His ability was even in the Fifth Dimension while the Dream Force he used was in the Fourth Dimension. So, what exactly was the issue?

The difference here was that crossing into Dimensions wasn't a 'power up'. It was a fundamental change of a person on a molecular level.

The simplest and boldest way to put it was that you were ascending into Godhood. Quite literally, to those in a lower Dimension than yourself, you were nothing less than a God.

Leonel was unable to undergo this complete transformation until he stepped out of the Third Dimension. Unfortunately, he couldn't without the later portion of [Dimensional Cleanse].

The truth was that the only reason Leonel was able to 'step' into higher Dimensions in other facets was as a result of his talent. His potential was much higher than his current level, so the bottlenecks that would have existed for someone else simply didn't exist for him.

But, none of this changed the fact that his overall abilities were all weighed down by a massive Third Dimensional anchor.

This was all to say one thing... The fact that Leonel could exhibit the fourth level, Control, in his current state, even while being in the Fifth Dimensional world that should have suppressed him... Made him nothing short of a monster.

'I see...' Leonel came to a realization.

This was why his split minds kept increasing. He had never reached a cap to begin with. And maybe... The only reason he was struggling so much with simulating his enemies was because of this same reason.

Leonel's understanding of his own ability took a massive leap forward.

'In that case, what information do you have on using and manipulating Dream Force...?'

Chapter 727

Leonel began to very seriously go through all the information Valiant Heart had on Dream Force. To his surprise, there was quite some amount of it. But, Leonel quickly realized how.

Among all the abilities one could run into in battle, and as devastating as many could be, maybe the most feared one were all related to Dream Force.

Matters related to consciousness were among the most enigmatic in all of existence. To face someone who could seemingly control it was daunting. As such, the amount of information here had less to do with Valiant Heart's prowess, and was more reflective of the Dimensional Verse's focus as a whole.

This much made sense, though. The Ability Index Leonel attached to himself was the Sensory Dream Force type. However, there were still many others. For these others, all of them ended with the very same red underlined 'Manifestation' level, but the first four and something three or two levels greatly differed.

For example, there was an Illusion Dream Force type. These individuals were excellent at using tricks of the mind and thrusting others into their fabricated worlds.

It was safe to say that no one wanted to run into such a person in battle.

‘Ah...’

Even among the very first things Leonel learned, he was floored.

‘Dream Force is a type of Soul Force. Yet, all this time I’ve been treating it just like any other Force...’

Leonel almost felt like kicking himself. It was such a simple shift in ideology but it was important enough to flip the table of his understanding.

What was the difference between Force and Soul Force? Well, the simplest difference was in tangibility.

Force could apply change into one’s surroundings at a whim. For example, Leonel could directly strengthen his body with his Force. Likewise, his Force Strengthening Deviations could be directly applied to the environment as well.

When Leonel used his Light Elemental Force, his legs were directly enveloped by it. When he used his Scarlet Star Force, his organs were charred by it. When Leonel activated his Metal Body, his body was directly strengthened by it.

These were all abilities that encompassed Force.

What about Soul Force, though?

If Leonel wanted to make use of Soul Force, usually he needed a medium. This medium usually came in the form of a Force Art, just like the mages of Camelot.

In Camelot, one needed to use their Spirit Pressure to execute their Mage Arts. This so-called 'Spirit Pressure' was exactly the same Soul Force being mentioned of here.

'It didn't become possible for me to use Mage abilities with any sort of fluidity in the absence of Mage Arts until...'

Leonel's body froze. He almost couldn't stop himself from trembling all over. ρ??C(???)???

The current Leonel could bend the Elements to his will with nothing more than a single thought. His body itself had become a perfect medium for this. However, the only reason it was possible was because he had formed his Mage Core!

In the past, Leonel could still forcefully manipulate the Elements without his Mage Core, but the strength he could display then wasn't even a tenth of what he could now. And even then, his magic was still the most powerful only when he used Mage Arts in conjunction with his Mage Core.

It all suddenly hit Leonel like a ton of bricks.

All this time, he had been applying his Dream Force just like any other Force. But, what he had been doing was the equivalent of manipulating the Elements without Mage Arts and without a Mage Core.

Leonel really didn't know what to say to his own stupidity.

Not only was he handicapping his Dream Force, but he was handicapping his magic as well!

Right now, Leonel had three Stars rotating within his Ethereal Glabella's world. These three Stars continuously purified normal Force for him. However, what it converted it into wasn't Dream Force... but rather normal Soul Force.

Leonel had been subconsciously splitting this Soul Force into two streams. One remained intact for the sake of casting his spells, manipulating his Mage Core and bending the Elements to his will.

The second portion was 'sent' to his Dream World and was then catalyzed into Dream Force by himself. All this time, he had been treating Dream Force like just another Element he could conjure up with his Soul Force.

'Idiot... I can't let dad know about this or else I'll never hear the end of it...'

Leonel felt like he was doing a math proof for $1+1=2$, but the first line he started with was already $1+1=2$. He went through all those laboursome steps just to prove nothing. It was mildly infuriating.

Without hesitation, Leonel suddenly took a massive step. He flooded all of his Dream Force toward his three Stars.

BANG!

Leonel's mind went blank. It felt as though an explosion had gone off in his mind, ripping his consciousness to shreds. However, oddly enough, he felt not a single ounce of pain.

It wouldn't be until long later that Leonel realized the true strength of the Three Star Constitution. However, what he knew for sure now was that Star Force wasn't only exceptionally heavy, it was also very good at using this weight of its to purify.

All this time, silently churning away at the atmosphere's Force to turn it into Leonel's Soul Force, it never stopped, it never deviated, it never slowed...

At this moment, though, suddenly being flooded with Dream Force that rapidly catalyzed its very core into the highest level of Soul Force in existence... It finally evolved.

The slight diamond blue color of the Three Stars became more prominent. Its pure white was peeled back to reveal a heart tingling blue that sparkled like the most gorgeous of crystals.

The mist that hung around Leonel's Ethereal Glabella gained this gentle blue hue as well. It especially enveloped the roots of the Mage Core, causing its small budding form to suddenly grow.

From a size of just over six inches, the Mage Core shot up, soon soaring to over two meters in height.

Its petals gently swayed in the turbulence, now being several feet across each...

Chapter 728

Leonel's eyes shot open, his body leaping upward out of his control. Blinding golden lights enveloped him completely almost as though Light Elemental Force couldn't stop itself from flooding toward him.

BANG!

Leonel crashed against the ceiling, his face distorting and his nose nearly being flattened.

"... Uh..."

With nothing to grab onto, Leonel fell back toward the ground.

He tried to flip over to land on his feet, but he overcorrected, causing his body to spin more than ten times even though he had been aiming for just once.

It was safe to say that he completely screwed up the timing, resulting in him landing face first and his face being smashed into a flat patty once again.

"... What the hell..."

At this point, Leonel was far too scared to move, so he remained deathly still until he could understand what happened. It took a moment, but after simulating everything with his infallible memory that had seemingly gotten even sharper, he finally understood.

Since Leonel was still in the Third Dimension, his body's strength was still lacking, especially in comparison to the white and blue belts he had to fight. Though his mind could keep up, his body often couldn't.

In order to compensate, Leonel almost always had his Speed Branch Lineage Factor activated, just to different degrees depending on the situation. This allowed him to make up for his weaknesses.

His Speed Branch allowed him to make use of Light Elemental Force in his surroundings to boost his speed exponentially. This benefit only became greater after forming his Mage Core.

But, just now, way too much Light Elemental Force had come, causing him to overcorrect by a larger margin than he was ready for.

The reason was simple enough, but the cause of it... This was what was truly baffling.

With just a sweep of his body, Leonel realized many changes.

His Three Stars now produced Dream Force directly and seem to have grown tenfold. To account for their explosive increase, the space within Leonel's Ethereal Glabella had also expanded massively.

'My Internal Sight's range has gone from a few hundred meters to over ten kilometers even in a Fifth Dimensional world... My Mage Core grew by more than ten times... My mind can split more than 60 ways now... My magic is easily ten times more powerful...'

Leonel was at a complete loss.

Just a weeks ago, he had been worried about this exact thing. He had almost missed out on the benefits flexibility could have brought him. And, right here, there was a more than tenfold increase to his strength that had been sitting here untouched all this time.

As the purest and highest form of Soul Force there was, Dream Force was ideal for the usage of Camelot's magic system. The Force Arts Leonel drew with it, even without changing a single symbol, were immediately several times more powerful.

At this point, Leonel felt confident in healing his Coach back to full health right this moment. If it wasn't because he wasn't certain of how to send the old man back to Earth, he would have already.

Leonel finally managed to get a comprehensive understanding of his strength and sat up without being blown toward the ceiling. ρ??∫???

He looked down at his hands, shaking his head. How many more things was he missing out on? Just from a slight shift in philosophy, he had gained so much strength. How many other thoughts of his was wrong?

In the end, Leonel's frown vanished, his gaze sharpening.

Lamenting over this was a waste of time. He wasn't that kind of person.

Since he realized how valuable knowledge was in this world, he would just have to swallow up as much of it as he could. He would strip Valiant Heart of all the information he had before he inevitably left this place.

...

The days continued to tick by. As promised, Aina did indeed come to visit Leonel once a week. But, this only made her feel more at a loss.

Aina was very sensitive to Leonel's increase in strength. He seemed to be like a fish in water whenever it came to matters of training. She had only left him for a week, but he had grown so powerful so suddenly that she couldn't see where his limits lay. It was difficult for her to wrap her head around it.

The feelings she had were quite conflicting, though...

That day in the Joan Zone when she said she didn't want Leonel to change, she meant it.

Maybe this was just how the complex mind of a woman worked. On one hand, she had been berating Leonel for being too adverse to killing and too lenient with his enemies. But, on the other hand, that cheerful boy who always had a smile on his face wasn't a version of Leonel she wanted to lose.

She had lost too many people already. She hardly wanted to open up to Leonel at all in the beginning and this was a large reason why. And, maybe, it was still a reason. She didn't know what she would do if she ever had to lose Leonel too.

Seeing Leonel grow by leaps and bounds, the hooks of the Dimensional Verse sinking further and further in, Aina didn't know how she should feel.

Should she feel happy that her boyfriend was growing more powerful? Or should she try to shelter him away as much as possible, hiding him from this cruel world?

The emotions tugged and pulled at her from every direction. But, without an answer, she could only bury it deep, not much unlike she always did.

She smiled as she watched Leonel happily eat away at her food, keeping those complicated emotions locked away.

**

On this day, the day of the Selection had finally come. Having been moved up by several months due to the times of turmoil, it held much less fanfare than it once had in the past.

The other organizations that would often come to keep an eye on the next generation of Valiant Heart were somewhat strikingly missing, leaving only internal members.

It was under this half festive, half somber atmosphere that Leonel and Aina arrived.

Leonel held onto Aina's small hand as they walked forward. This was the second time that Leonel had been to this open arena. The first time he had been forced to step in to save Sael. This time, however, he would take center stage.

The participating members were mostly white belts and blue belts. Though there were some black belts that wanted to try their luck, they were mostly here for experience and nothing else.

The members of Polished Glass weren't too keen on joining. They weren't confident in their combat prowess and were focused on their Crafting. With all the knowledge Leonel had taught them over the past several weeks, they felt like they had enough to study for a lifetime.

None of this was too surprising by Leonel's estimation. What was, though, was the fact that Radlis was among these participating black belts.

The pale skinned and lanky jokester had disappeared from Polished Glass for a long while. But, at this moment, Leonel could see him up ahead, registering himself for the selection. The result made Leonel's brows arch upward.

It had to be known that much like Aina and Leonel, Radlis had only been here for about three months. A part of Leonel wanted to dismiss this as Radlis being like the other black belts, simply looking to gain experience. But, for some reason, Leonel didn't feel this way.

In order to join the Selection, one needed to accumulate a certain amount of merits. Though the black belts that had been here for years could just barely scrap together such an amount, what about Radlis who had only been here for such a short time?

'Interesting...'

Radlis, seemingly sensing Leonel's gaze, turned his neck and gave him a wide grin before walking off with his registration plaque.

Not long later, it was Leonel and Aina's turn. To their surprise, though, the one handling these registration affairs was a familiar old lady.

“Hello, Elder Magnaril.” Leonel said with a warm smile.

The old lady snorted, clearly still not liking the shape of Leonel’s face. The fact he was smiling now only made her feel even worse. And, he just had to still be holding her precious student’s hand in public like this, right in front of her, no less.

Over the past month, Aina hadn’t come to the lab even a single time. Magnaril knew that she had done nothing but train and train. Seeing such a talent waste away their potential like this truly made her intestines feel as though they were being twisted.

At this point, though, Magnaril could only obediently register the couple.

“Break a leg.” She said while giving Leonel a fake smile.

“Sure. But it won’t be mine.”

Leonel’s casual response made Magnaril freeze. In the end, she just sneered. She had no idea where this brat got his confidence from.

‘Hm...?’

Magnaril frowned. She had hardly finished her thought when she realized something.

Was he wearing white?

...

Leonel and Aina found a seat amongst the competitors. Ironically, this was the same place Leonel had been forced to sit as a freshmen before.

This time, though, sitting on the ground floor, he felt as though his vision was far wider.

“Are you nervous?” Leonel asked.

“Nervous?” Aina was stunned by the question.

Leonel laughed seeing how baffled she was. “I guess the answer to that is no.”

Aina shook her head, realizing that Leonel was just trying to tease her.

Was she nervous? Of course not. If there was anything she was feeling, it was a hope that these battles wouldn't be too easy or else there wouldn't be much of a point.

Unfortunately, though, there were many seeded participants who already had their entries locked in. The rest of them were essentially fighting for the remaining four spots.

Leonel was probably the most disappointed by this, though. He had waited long enough to teach Apestus a lesson, only to find out that the latter didn't even have to participate. In fact, he was probably not even in attendance today.

Still, these seeded positions hadn't been monopolized by Hero Peak. Even they couldn't get away with something like that. ρ??∫??????

From Leonel's understanding, there were eight spots already taken. Two for the Hero Faction. Two for the Bear Rose Faction. Two for the Severed Heart Faction. The last two were listed as miscellaneous, but considering one of them was Sael, Leonel assumed that these two were reserved for the former Valiant Hall members.

Compared to the idle chatter of the two, the atmosphere hovering around the rest was quite heavy.

The time continued to tick by until the final individual was registered and the elders convened a small meeting.

Finally, Magnaril stepped forward to explain, standing on the very podium Raylion had used to flip Valiant Heart Mountain on its head. However, the message she disseminated was simpler and far less contentious.... At least in the beginning.

“The rules for this Selection will be simple and straight forward.

“Today, we will open up four battle platforms. The Selection will begin when the sun officially rises and will end when the sun officially sets. Whichever four manage to hold on to the very end will be given the four remaining spots to enter the Valiant Heart Zone.

“Each participant will have unlimited challenges. However, this comes with its own set of rules.

“First, you cannot challenge a platform defender more than once unless said defender loses and reclaims their spot. Only then can you challenge this individual a second time.

“Second, you can only challenge once every half hour.

“Third, a defender is allowed ten minutes of rest between every challenge.

“Fourth, a defender than has failed to defend three times will no longer be allowed to challenge.

“Now, the rules of challenges aside, this Selection will be unlike the past. Valiant Heart is currently in the midst of struggle and what we need are warriors, not cowards.

“In the past, there was a prohibition on crippling. This has been removed.

“There was a prohibition on killing. This has been removed.

“Those who join but fail to issue at least one challenge or defend a platform at least once, will be expelled from Valiant Heart.

“Those who want to withdraw, do so now or bear the consequences later.”

Many of the participants turned a deathly shade of pale. What was going on? When had the Selection become like this?

There was no surprise that many of the black belts that had come to test their luck immediately stood up and withdrew. In fact, from numbering in the hundreds, there weren't even 200 participants left after Magnaril's words fell.

The elders remained expressionless as they watched this scene. At this point, seeing the lack of backbone many of these students had, they felt that maybe Raylion had been correct.

There were no shortage of elders dissatisfied with Raylion's approach, but seeing how much they were rotting from the inside out ... It was hard to continue to fuel hatred for his methods. If things continued like this for too long and they continued to weaken with each successive generation, very soon, there wouldn't be any Valiant Heart Mountain left to be spoken of.

Long before their enemies got to them, they would crumbled from the inside.

Magnaril waited patiently until just about 180 were left. Finally, when it seemed like no one else was intent on leaving, Magnaril nodded.

Even though 180 was less than she had hoped for, it still wasn't to the point that they had no good seedlings left. Though she was certain that many of those who remained believed they could just concede quickly enough to not be harmed, this was still good enough for now. Maybe with Raylion's methods, they'd soon breed even more warriors.

On the ground below, Leonel didn't really feel much about the sudden allowance of killing. He had already deduced this much. He could see through Raylion's plan quite well.

What he was surprised about, though, was that, once again, Radlis didn't show any signs of backing down. It was quite baffling indeed...

“Now we will begin.” Magnaril said coldly. “Four defenders, come forward. For every ten minutes four defenders haven’t been chosen, the quota for entry remaining will be sliced by one. If you deem to waste all forty minutes, not only will there be no spots remaining for the lot of you, but you will all be expelled.”

Everyone knew one would be at a disadvantage being amongst the first defenders and challengers, especially since everyone only got three chances to defend. However, if everyone wanted to hold back from taking a small loss, then everyone would lose!

Surprisingly, though, there was a couple that looked toward each other with knowing smiles.

In a flash, Leonel and Aina shot forward. Before anyone could react, they had already taken one platform each, their auras steady and even somewhat overbearing.

No one had expected for the first two defenders to appear to be a pair of white belts. And, they definitely wouldn’t have expected them to be white belts who had only just joined Valiant Heart!

Chapter 730

Leonel took a deep breath. The subtle movement seemed to make Force from the surroundings swarm toward him, making it seem as though his skin was twinkling with a subtle radiance.

Aina silently held out her battle ax, her expression hidden behind her mask. She didn’t seem to prepare anything, but her aura was as steady and unmoving as a mountain.

It was safe to say that no small amount of individuals were shocked by what they were witnessing. Though, eventually, it would be the white belts that would be forced forward by their seniors... no one had ever thought that it would be done willingly.

Among the crowd of youths that remained, there were no doubt members of Bear Rose who locked onto Leonel immediately. Not only were there individuals from Bear Rose, but there were no small number of King of Ores faction members, including Sarrieth, within the crowd.

For a moment, the youths weren't entirely certain of what to do. The fact two had gone up willingly made them all feel as though the momentum had been snatched. If they continued to lay back and force others up, it might not be as beneficial to them as they had once thought.

It was then that the ground quaked.

One would have thought that such a thing was caused by an earthquake or maybe a huge explosion in the distance, but when their gazes swung over to the source, all that was found was a massive bear of a man slowly walking forward.

The man stood at two and a half meters tall. From top to bottom, he was covered in a thick rose-gold plate armor. The chest plate of this armor had the image of a roaring bear on it that reminded Leonel a lot of King Arthur's white lion armor.

The detail on the armor was so intricately laid that it looked far more like a display piece than a battle armor. It was hard to fathom that someone would take such a gorgeous Craft to war...

What was maybe most astonishing about this armor, though, was that far more than just one individual wore it. In fact, there were exactly 12, all of whom were wearing this elaborate art piece and completely concealing the organization's uniform.

The design wasn't subtle in the slightest. To Leonel, it couldn't have been more obvious that these people were from Bear Rose. However, it was also very clear that this massive bear of a man wasn't walking forward for the sake of becoming a defender. His target was clear.

As though to confirm this, just as the massive man was about to walk through the final line of waiting participants, his hands snatched outward with a surprising deftness and speed.

Before anyone could react, the massive man had already taken two necks into his large palms. Then, with one swift motion, he threw them in an arc through the air.

The dull sound of bone and flesh meeting stone resounded alongside groans of pain and confusion. But, unfortunately for these two randomly picked white belts, they already found themselves on the stage against their will.

They looked around in dismay, even sending a glance back toward Elder Magnaril for some help. But, all they received in response was an indifferent glance and an icy cold sentence.

“Stepping down will forfeit one of your rights to defend.” ρ??∫???????

This simple string of words was like a bucket of ice water being poured over the heads of the both of them.

The massive bear of a man continued to walk forward as though nothing had happened. He, much like anyone else who was relatively astute, was quite clear on the shift the Elders and Valiant Heart were experiencing now.

As important as strength and hierarchy was in the past, it had only become more so now.

Who cared about small petty rules or the inconvenience of a few? As long as your fist was big enough, you could do as you pleased! Things were this simple and would only become simpler!

BANG!

With a small hop, the rose-gold armor wearing giant landed heavily onto Leonel’s platform. Even now, his face was obscured by a heavy helmet and visor. Despite the somewhat feminine color of his armor, it didn’t seem to take away from his bloodthirsty aura in the slightest.

“Never did I think that the brat who dared to slap the face of my Bear Rose Faction would choose to appear so soon. But... This is good. This will be a memory impossible for others to forget. The Hero Faction isn’t the only Faction not to be trifled with.”

Leonel’s lip twitched when he heard this. The Hero Faction was not meant to be trifled with? Did he think that Leonel had a bias for one against the other? If anything, the things Leonel had done to the Hero Faction were far worse.

But, clearly, these Bear Rose Faction members had only just come back from the frontline battle against the Oryx. They knew little of what happened in Valiant City during their absence.

It made one wonder. With so many out on the frontlines, why did it seem like Raylion and Apestus were always here?

Of course, that might just be an illusion. After all, it wasn't like Leonel could bother to keep an eye on them all the time.

It wasn't long before Leonel had removed all distracting thoughts in his mind. He stood just 20 or so meters away from the massive bear of a man, his expression placid. As things were now, this was the only challenge that had been issued. It was as though the entirety of the arena had fallen silent for the sake of observing this one battle.

"If you want to stand a chance, I advise you to take your armor off." Leonel said evenly. "If not, this battle will end before you get a chance to do anything."

The massive man snorted. "My name is Dune. I'll be sure to engrave it onto your gravestone after you die so you don't forget what happened to you even on the other side."

BANG!

Dune launched himself forward, the stones beneath his feet cracking with fine lines.