

Dimensional Descent - Chapter 24

Leonel hadn't moved in weeks. He wasn't even consciously aware of the fact that Aina had left and come back several times already. Without any strong threats around him, and subconsciously putting his trust in her, he went all out.

Due to the strong winds and comfort that emitted from his tent, the Frenchmen hadn't dared to approach. By now, they were all convinced that he was an envoy of God.

Aina entered the tent once more. But this time, she frowned deeply seeing his current state.

Leonel's lips were a deep shade of blue, his body quaking with every passing second. The whirlwind of Force surging toward him was more than ten times greater than it had been on the first day. Whether that was due to the increase in his Spirit, or due to the fact he had a deeper understanding of the technique after actually reading it, it was impossible to tell.

Ghastly blue-green veins ran across Leonel's neck and forehead. Beads of sweat rolled down his body, mixing in with the foul odor it was giving off. If Leonel knew that Aina had continuously dealt with his body odor without a complaint for so many weeks, who knew how he'd feel.

If one peered into Leonel's brain stem, it would be possible to see a growing seed of concentrated Force. There was no simple way to complete this process. Leonel had to carve out his own flesh while simultaneously using Force to heal himself.

This was why this step was so dangerous. The brain stem was arguably the most important part of the brain. If it was ever damaged, death was basically guaranteed. Yet, Leonel had to actively do exactly that to carve out a Node for himself.

The only way this was possible was due to the special characteristic of [Dimensional Cleanse]. Not every Force technique would carve out Nodes in the same places, and most directly avoided such dangerous areas. It was precisely because the creator of this technique was so confident in his methods that he dared pen down this technique.

'Use your senses to perfectly memorize the structure of cells in your brain stem... reorganize... stimulate their recreation... destroy the original... repeat...'

It took hundreds of years of research before humans of Earth were able to use stem cells to reproduce brain cells. In fact, it was still in its infant stages even now. Yet, this technique was able to use Force to surpass anything Earth was capable of.

However, it was still up to Leonel in the end to repeat this process countless times. It was simply impossible for him to do this for every one of the millions of cells in his brain stem. That said, a normal Node formed of Fourth Grade Force would barely be visible to the naked eye and could have its size measured in cubic micrometers.

The issue Leonel faced was that his Node was not normal. And, though a normal Node would only take up the space of about 10 cells at most, the true difficulty came in properly restructuring everything so that your mind could continue to function properly.

That alone was already difficult... But Leonel had to replace and reorganize not just 10 cells... But
100!

On any other day, a mere paper cut could slice across far more than 100 human cells with ease. But to Leonel, that seemingly small number was the barrier between him and death.

He knew he could have stopped at 10, that he could have stopped at 20, even at 50... These numbers were already far more than a normal person could match. And, it should also be

considered that [Dimensional Cleanse] wasn't a normal technique to begin with, another technique might have their user form a Node of five cells at most!

But, Leonel knew that if he stopped, he would be cheating himself. What had he wasted so much time Priming himself for if he wasn't going to tap into his full potential? If he stopped now, then he might as well have formed his first Node back when his Spirit was at 0.12.

Blood began to leak from Leonel's nose. It was such a deep crimson that it almost appeared

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The calculations running through Leonel's mind were astronomical. Just how many other neurons did 100 brain stem cells connect to? How many spinal connections? How many smooth muscle connections? How many organs did they control?

Rerouting his whole body like this put immense pressure on his mind. He just wanted to sleep, to alleviate that pain racking his body, but he knew he couldn't.

PANDA-N0VEL 'Persistence...'

His back straightened. He realized now that the reason he fought those seven A-grade Invalids wasn't because of some random excuse, it was because of something his father had ingrained in his body since he was young.

Persist.

Aina stood at the doorway, her teeth biting down hard on her soft lips.

'He's forming his first Node now? How is that possible? He should at the very least be on his fifth or sixth... Is his high coordination and reaction purely due to his ability then? What kind of ability is that?'

Aina obviously didn't have access to the same stats Leonel self-created. But, she had a natural ability to read people that came from years of training and experience. From her experience, it was simply impossible to have such high 'base stats' without first forging Nodes. She herself was already working on her seventh.

In fact, the base strength she displayed wasn't her full strength. Because she rarely used her Force, the stats Leonel had of her were actually wrong. After all, he can only measure what he can see, and he had too little knowledge of Force before.

The only point that stood now, however, was the fact Leonel's ability, whatever it was, was actually so great...

Suddenly, a roar escaped Leonel's lips, a shower of blood bursting from the pores of his body.

In the next moment, the sound of something that almost resembled a massive flame being lit swept through. Concentric circles of rippling force winds and dust billowed around him, shooting the tent he sat into the sky.

Leonel opened his eyes with a flash, their hazel burning with a deep blue light that flickered and disappeared a moment later.

He was a complete mess. His body was coated in blood from head to toe. In fact, the his general vicinity looked as though a concentrated rain of blood had fallen, splattering around gruesomely.

However, if one looked closely, one could see that this wasn't normal blood. It had an impure, brownish-black quality to it that released a terrible smell. At that moment, despite his looks, Leonel felt more alive than he ever had.

[Leonel Morales]_{PANDA NOVEL}

[Strength: 0.80; Speed: 0.75 (+0.1); Agility: 0.85 (+0.1); Coordination: 1.00; Stamina: 0.87 (+0.05);
Reactions: 1.00; Spirit: 0.30]

That was it. He had crossed the limits the human body could theoretically endure!

His other stats hadn't improved, but this made sense. After all, it was a Node for his brain, not his body. They only had minor ticks up. But, Leonel knew that if he activated the Force in his first Node, his stats would increase by another margin.

'... Seems I've missed something important...' Leonel reprimanded himself.

"You stink." Aina's soothing voice appeared above Leonel sitting form.

Leonel was speechless. But, looking down at himself and taking a whiff, even he could only cringe.

Sweeping out his senses, he quickly found the nearest water source.

"Come with me." Leonel said.

Aina raised an eyebrow.

Leonel grinned. "It's alright. I'm okay with you taking advantage of me."

It was Aina's turn to be speechless. In the end she turned and blushed, not meeting Leonel's eyes.

At that moment, Leonel couldn't hide the confusion in his heart. He had thought that Aina's bashful personality was all just an act, not different from how Yuri pretended to be the kind, considerate friend for so many years. But what was this?

"Leaving you here doesn't sit well with me. Come on." Leonel dashed away.

After seeing that he wasn't scrutinizing her anymore, Aina quickly followed. By the time she caught up, Leonel was already stripping by a riverside. Flustered, she could only find a tree to sit behind in the opposite direction.

Aina's militaristic outfit didn't have any defensive abilities. All it had were its convenient pockets that allowed her to store many things like miniature spatial devices, and the real reason she chose it: a self-cleaning function.

She liked to stay clean, but she was also practical. Finding a place to bathe in a Zone or even on Earth right now was near impossible. So though she missed the feeling of water gliding across her soft skin, she gave it up. ♪♫♫♫♫♫♫

"Do you think they'll be alright without us?"

Leonel's voice traveled to Aina's as he alternated between scrubbing himself and his clothes.

"They'll be fine..." Aina said softly. "... Yuri knows what to do. Plus, only the Beginner Zone works on the same timeline. The Zone we're in currently is ten to one. Not even three days have passed to them yet."

"Oh. I didn't know that." Leonel muttered.

Aina always seemed to speak to him as if the things she was saying were obvious. Did she not realize that he had no idea what she was talking about?

Leonel frowned. 'Uncle Montez said that because Earth had so much potential, there were several other worlds looking to get a piece of the pie... His words seemed to imply that they had started doing this even before the Metamorphosis began... Could Aina's family be related to this?'

"Did you really only just light your first Node?"

After several moments of silence, Aina's sweet voice traveled to his ears again.

"You know about Nodes?" Leonel asked, surprised.

"Did you think you were the only one?" Leonel could almost hear the light smile through Aina's voice.

He could barely hold back his desire to see it.

"Sort of... I had to do a lot to get my hands on the method. I didn't think others were already aware."

Leonel wasn't lying. He only got [Dimensional Cleanse] because he was the first to clear a Zone, and as such, he received a Tier 9 Black reward. There could only be one of him, right?

But, it seemed he forgot to consider that a Force technique didn't have to be such high grade. And, also, from Uncle Montez's words, maybe others had gotten their hands on treasures through other means. Maybe that was why Aina seemed to have more treasures on hand than she should.

"I did just light my first one." Leonel eventually answered. "I chose my brain stem as my first location, so it was pretty dangerous. I should have prepared some more."

Aina froze. "What did you just say?"

Leonel raised an eyebrow. "That I chose my brain —"

"Are you insane?!"

"Uh..." How was he supposed to respond to that? "... Maybe?"

"Maybe?! Why didn't you just pick a spot on your legs?! You can only choose nine locations at best, and most can't even form a second. Recklessly choosing your brain now is not only dangerous, but if you reach a bottleneck in your potential, your bodily strength will always be substandard!"

Leonel could hear Aina almost huffing and puffing. It seemed the Aina who could curse out a grown man three times her size had come out. He was too angry to see it that night, but he was sure it was an adorable sight.

“I knew I should have woken you up...” Aina bit her lip again.

“You shouldn’t do that, you’ll scar your lip.”

Aina was shocked awake from her own rant, finding Leonel standing before her with wet, dripping hair. It was fine if he wanted to come, but did he really have to do it shirtless?

“... You don’t understand. The bottlenecks people face get worse and worse with every step. Unless you’re lucky enough to be born with a Lineage Factor that gives you Natural Force Nodes, reaching past the third Node is impossible. You would need Force Node medicines, but Earth just can’t produce those now.”

Leonel smiled. “You don’t have to worry about me.”

It was a smile he had practiced in the front of the mirror so many times, the very smile he prepared just for this one person.

Seeing Aina completely disarmed, he felt a swelling of satisfaction in his heart.

‘Whoever that old fart is who wrote [Dimensional Cleanse] really is a liar. No difference between Cultivated and Natural Force Nodes my ass. You could have at least mentioned this in a footnote you ass.’

After recovering, Aina’s expression turned serious once more.

“It’s good that you know that I’m worrying. In that case, be less reckless and choose your right arm for your next Node. It will improve your throwing abilities by a large margin.”

Leonel nodded innocently like an obedient child, but internally he had no intention of listening.

After awakening his first Node, Leonel gained a greater grasp of just what his ability was. If he had to sum it up in one word it was... Calculation.

In the simplest terms, his mind was like a supercomputer. The reason why he had almost mistaken Internal Sight for his ability was precisely because of his mind's ability to make use of that information far better than anyone else would be able to.

It was the reason he could tell the difference between a loaded and unloaded gun by its weight. It was the reason he could assign 'stats' just by glancing at a person's body. And it was the reason he was certain that there was a perfect configuration of Nodes that would maximize his body's potential.

He had accidentally stumbled into the perfect start with his brain stem and he didn't plan on taking the second until he had gathered enough knowledge to find the next perfect step.

That said, he had already eliminated his arms, legs, and most of his chest. He was certain that the perfect second Node was along his spine somewhere, he just had to run a few more calculations to find that flawless location.

As for Aina's worries. Well... What she didn't know wouldn't hurt her.

'Aina seems to be preparing to form her seventh Force Node. Her Node locations actually have 93% compatibility with her, I didn't expect that. Oh!'

"What are you doing?" Aina frowned as she gazed at Leonel. She felt for a moment that she had been stripped bare in front of him, but she couldn't find a logical reason why. Leonel's spirit was just too far above hers. Had he not been standing right in front of her, she might not have even noticed.

Leonel snapped out of his thoughts. He had just seen something that explained to him why it was Aina seemed to cultivate without pulling in Force Energy. She was actually practicing a technique aside from a Force technique, one that applied particular pressure on her blood.

However, Leonel knew instinctually he couldn't practice this technique. Only those with Aina's blood could...

'Just what's her story exactly...?'

"Sorry, just committing your words to memory!" Leonel saluted like a soldier.

"Pft —" Aina laughed beside herself. It was such a dazzling scene that Leonel stood completely frozen in time.

'... I bet she didn't have to practice that in front of a mirror...'

Just then, the sounds of war horns reached their ears.

Sending a glance toward each other, they dashed back to the war camp.