

Dimensional Descent - Chapter 3

[Don't worry for those who don't understand most of what happens in this chapter. I know American Football isn't exactly an international sport. Rest easy, this is the only chapter the sport will have relevance in]

“Good evening gentleman, I hope we can have a good game today. Everyone knows the stakes, so play free and play safe. Stay within the rules as we don't have to have a problem.”

The crowd was deafening. The thumping of feet, the boisterous chants, the heated anticipation boiled in the air, shaking the very stadium they stood within.

The Royal Blue Academy's Royal Stadium sat within a massive glass structure formed of curved triangular panels. It danced with the setting sun beautifully, capturing dark reds and oranges that played across its reflective surfaces.

The green, white-striped football fields were completely empty with the exception of 11 men who stood on the 50-yard line facing one another. Clicking and flashing cameras sounded, trying to capture every moment.

Leonel stood proudly, two of his teammates to either of his sides. He calmly smiled at the arrogant sneers of his long time opponents from Angel Wing Academy, his helmet tucked under his arm.

His football pads and jersey fit on like a knight's armor, glistening a beautiful deep blue. The only exception was the number on his chest which stood out as a bright white. The number 3.

“Here is the coin we will be flipping today.” The Head Referee continued to speak, stretching out a beautifully designed coin that was about half the width of his palm. “On one side we have a football decorated with the flag of the fallen American Empire. This will be tails.

“On this side we have the Paradise Palace. It will be heads.

“This coin was designed by a Four-Star Metal Worker. It was given the name ‘Uniting’. It represents our Ascension Empire’s ability to ingratiate all of its past conquests, leaving a place for all.”

The Head Referee allowed the ten players to see both sides.

“Are you prepared to lose?”

A gaze filled with confidence bore down on Leonel. The culprit was a young man with long flowing blond hair. His white jersey was almost blinding under the lights, making one have to squint just to maintain eye contact.

This young man was a Four-Star Quarterback prospect, Conrad Siegfried.

“The result will be just the same as it’s always been.” Leonel replied faintly.

“You know the drill. Royal Blue, you’re the home team. Call it in the air.”

The Head Referee tossed the coin into the air.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl. The piercing gazes of two young men met across space, a spinning coin falling slowly between them.

“Tails.”

The coin landed with a soft thud on the grass below. •PANDA-NOVEL.COM

“The result is Tails. Royal Blue, would you like to receive or kick?”

Leonel grinned as though the answer was obvious.

“We receive.”

“Angel Wing, pick the direction you’d like to kickoff from.”

Conrad casually pointed. He hadn’t let Leonel’s comments bother him. If it wasn’t for Leonel’s birth, it would be him who would be the best of this generation. Others would let this fact crush them, but it filled Conrad with a burning desire to win by any means.

Leonel turned, heading back to the sidelines. He grabbed his helmet’s face mask, sliding it onto his head like a knight’s helm.

In that moment, his aura completely changed. A violent pressure suffocated the Royal Blue sidelines as almost a hundred pairs of gazes landed on Leonel’s dark, tinted visor.

Soon, the entire stadium fell into an eerie quiet as Leonel met each one of their gazes head on.

“Respect the game. Persist to the end.” Was all Leonel said.

“Respect the game. Persist to the end.”

Royal Blue repeated these words as one. The crowd joined in, a torrent of momentum climbing to infinity.

A rush of emotion filled the air, a wild cheering shaking the very ground once more.

“Let’s go.”

[And here we go again. The fourth year and the fourth National Championship appearance for Five-Star Quarterback Leonel Morales and his Royal Blues. Will it be another victory? Or with the star quarterback end his tenure with the only blemish on his resume?]

[I think we all know the answer to that, Phil. In case you've all forgotten, let me remind you. This is THE greatest quarterback prospect to ever be birthed. This young man was throwing darts in his diapers. He could sleepwalk through this game and still win by 30]

[Don't think we don't know what you're doing, Rick. You're just hoping your Los Angeles Sewer Rats trade up to pick him in the 2198 draft. Well let me break it to you. We have the number one overall pick this year!]

The entertaining commentary of the Phil-Rick duo was in full swing, the liveliness was intoxicating.

[And here it is! The kickoff of the 119th National Championship Game!]

Angel Wing's kicker did a light jog up before unleashing a booming kick that soared through the air, landing out of the back of the end zone for a touch back. PANDA NOVEL

With that, the game had truly begun.

[Here we go, the first play]

[It seems that Coach Owen is really letting Morales have full reign now. Immediately entering a five wide set, not even using a running back]

[Ha! Morales is all the running back they need]

Leonel shifted his gaze from left to right, checking the defense. He could see the vicious gazes of the Angel Wing defensive line. Their middle linebackers gaze locked onto Leonel's. He was a Four-

Star Professional in his Junior year. Unfortunately, much like his quarterback, he had been played to death by Leonel for the last two years.

His eyes swiftly met James' as though in tacit agreement.

“Blue 80. BLUE 80. Set. Hut!”

Leonel clapped his hands, his leg slowly raising and setting into position as he accepted the snapped ball.

He glided backward effortlessly. His back leg had hardly planted before he cocked his arm back and released a laser.

[A corner blitz!]

[Morales didn't check the play, he actually threw it directly over the corner's head!]

[James dropped the ball?! That could have been a 20-yard gain! How unlike him]

[Hey...!]

The loud blowing of a whistle sounded.

“Unnecessary roughness. Roughing the passer. Number 21. 15-yard penalty, first down.”

Leonel felt that the wind had been knocked out of him. Having opened up his chest to throw the ball, he had been completely blindsided by the blitzing corner. Of course, he had known it was coming, but he couldn't throw and dodge at the same time.

“Gonna be a long night, pretty boy.” Number 21 grinned down at Leonel just as another whistle blew.

“Unsportsmanlike conduct. Number 21. 15-yard penalty, first down.”

The corner raised his hands in mock defeat, swaggering back to his side of the field. ,p00f000000

“You good, cap?”

One of Leonel’s offensive lineman helped him up.

“No problem.” Leonel said with a cold smile.

The team huddled in.

“Sorry Leo, you took a hit for no reason.” James’ gaze was filled with shame.

“Don’t worry about it, it happens.” Leo hit his shoulder pads. “Head up. Didn’t we just gain a free 30-yards anyway?”

“Since they wanna play games, let’s play games. The play goes — Trips right, red under seam, wide out bang. On two, on two. Break!”

The huddle broke, leaving Leonel to jog to the line.

He paused in shotgun, waiting for his team to get set. Usually, he would scan the defense. But this time, his head turned to the right, his gaze piercing toward just one side of the field.

He raised a finger pointing at number 21. He had never seen this player before, so he must have been a freshman. Considering his cockiness, he was most definitely at least a Four-Star recruit. It seemed Leonel would have to teach him to be more obedient.

[Ooooo! He’s done it now]

“Blue 21. BLUE 21. Down set. Hut. HUT!”

The whistle blew.

“Offside. Number 21. Five-yard penalty, first down.”

[He’s toying with the rookie now. You think the little guy thought Leonel would just try to force the ball toward his side of the field? He’s too naive. Football is a game of the mind]

[Excellent use of the hard count to deal with an overaggressive rusher. What is Angel Wing thinking sending a corner blitz twice in a row?]

[From now on, Morales is in control!]

And in control he was. The first drive was no less than a masterclass in timing, accuracy and precision. In just 12 plays and 7:36 minutes, the Royal Blues found the end zone.

[Even with his star tight end having two dropped passes, Morales finds pay dirt, stacking one touchdown to the stat sheet]

The game became a back and forth affair. Though Royal Blue had Leonel and James, not only did James seem to be having a bad game, but Angel Wing had far more Four-Star recruits than they did. Aside from the dynamic duo, Royal Blue was mostly constructed of Three-Star prospects. After all, they were only ranked third of the Academies while Angel Wing was ranked second.

However, Leonel pulled the team from the depths of despair time and time again.

[What a bullet over the middle!]

[Morales is really carrying the load of the offense, but he’s taken a lot of hits this game. You have to wonder if it’s worth it, he has nothing left to prove at this level of football]

[That’s just part of his charm. Would he really be Leonel Morales if he pulled himself out of this game?]

Time ticked and the fourth quarter came around, a score of 35-31 in favor of the Angel Wings hanging on the scoreboard.

“What the hell are you doing out there, Bennett?!” Coach Owen grabbed James’ chest pads, fury billowing through his thick mustache. “You choose the biggest game of the year to shit the bed?!”

James’ head hung low.

“I get it.” Coach Owen took a step back. “You’ve already won three times, this game is probably meaningless to you already. But think of your juniors. This may very well be their only opportunity in their lifetimes.”

“Coach, that’s...” James wanted to defend himself, his gaze flickering with a complex light.

He simply couldn’t find the courage to do so. He already had five dropped passes this game alone. That may be as many as his whole academy career from the start to now. He really was playing out of character.

Leonel came over with a smile. In truth, if one ignored the happy expression on his face, it would be easy to see the kind of sorry state he was in. He had already been forced to tape up his ribs at half time after yet another late hit.

“Come on coach, you know he’ll step up when it really counts. If we didn’t keep this game a bit close, wouldn’t the crowd be too bored?”

The sound of a whistle came from the field. The Angel Wings kicked off, leaving the ball in their possession for a final drive, 1:15 sitting on the clock.

“Isn’t this what we live for?” Leonel’s grin sent a wave of calm through the sidelines. “Let’s go win this.”

Leonel slid on his helmet. Like a general leading his army, he stepped out onto the field, his mind incomparably focused.

[And here we go. Scoot up to the edge of your seats everyone, this is the final drive to decide it all!]

[A nice and easy run on first down. It's clear the Royal Blues are taking their time, settling the pace, looking to end it on their own terms]

[Excellent timing on that out route. 87's been a key piece with Bennett's down game. He may only be a Three Star prospect, but he's stepped up big today]

[0:47 on the clock and the Royal Blues are already at midfield. Morales has them running like a finely tuned engine]

[Oh no! 56 whiffs on a block, letting a rusher free!]

[Morales spins out of the tackle, rushing to his right]

[A work of art, nothing less! A slight flick of the wrist to send the flying 40-yards right between the numbers]

[87 tip toes out of bounds at the opponent's 6!]

[0:03 on the clock, my blood is boiling! Can they do it, can they seal their dynasty with a victory?!]

"This is it boys, leave it all out there. Respect the game. Persist to the end." Leonel's gaze blazed.

"Alright. Z personnel, Y boot swing over, motion zig fade. On one, on one. Break!"

Leonel walked to the line, his heart as calm as a lake. The blaring cheers of the rocking stadium, the countless flashing cameras, the sea of white uniformed enemies glaring at him like a piece of meat... It all rolled off his shoulders as though they weren't there at all.

With a light smile, Leonel turned his head to the right of the field, his arm slowly raising to point at a familiar freshman.

PANDA-NOVEL [It can't be! Morales is doing it again!]

[Ahaha! This is the spirit of the game! To call out your opponent on the final play, what guts, what imposing grandeur!]

"Blue 21. BLUE 21. Down set. HUT!"

The ball spiraled through the Royal Blues' center's legs, hitting Leonel's palms perfectly.

[It's a designed boot to the right! The Royal Blues really are targeting the rookie this time!]

[The rookie slipped up! He thought Morales was going to hit him with the hard count again and got caught flat footed! There goes Bennett, sliding past him for the corner fade!]

[Morales sees him! This is it, Bennett is wide open!]

Leonel rolled to the side, the football between both his hands. The Royal Blues hadn't run a single designed boot all game, the defense was caught completely off guard. By the time they realized what was happening, Leonel was practically alone on the right side of the field. The only others with him were the rookie, 21, and James who had faded to the corner of the endzone.

The rookie was caught in no man's land. He had no idea whether he should rush after James, or if he should try to get a hit in on Leonel, ending the game.

In the end, he rushed forward. He knew it was already too late to catch up to James, but maybe he had a chance at Leonel who was rushing toward him. Unfortunately... Leonel smirked. With a flick of his wrist, the ball soared over 21's head, landing right in James' hands.

[Morales does it again! Royal Blues W—]

The deafening crowd fell into an eerie silence as the ball slipped through James' hands and the clock hit triple zeros.