

Dimensional Descent - Chapter 8

Leonel stirred awake. His eyes blinked for a moment before he sat up far quicker than he should have, something that he instantly regretted.

However, the sharp pain he expected from his ribs never came, causing him to look down at himself in confusion.

'My injuries are healed...? Wait, where am I?'

Leonel was bombarded with a sudden wave of sensory information. The limestone beneath his butt and hands, the odd wind that gently blew against his exposed skin, even the ancient smell in that hung in the air, almost reminiscent of a copy room with a slight mustiness to it.

The feeling made Leonel keel over, vomiting out the contents of his stomach. It was just that his belly happened to be quite empty at the moment, so he could only dry heave.

By the time his body finally stopped convulsing, Leonel was left with a bitter feeling of confusion. Everything seemed too loud, too bright, too textured, all at the same time.

No matter how much Leonel willed it away, it didn't seem intent on disappearing. He sat there for hours, feeling sicker than he had in all his life.

The world had suddenly become too detailed for him take in. It was as though he was staring at an optical illusion puzzle, one that if you gazed at long enough, it would appear to be moving. Yet, this wasn't an optical illusion, it had become his reality.

Half a day later, Leonel felt his throat burning. He felt a thirst he had never felt before in his life, but there was simply no water here, there was nothing but ancient ruins and the unconscious bodies of his friends. He would go look for water if he could, but every time he tried to stand, his head would spin.

Not only did the world give him more detail than he could handle, but his body did as well. He could almost feel thoughts forming in his mind, he could feel the electrical pulses going from his brain to his limbs, he could feel the powering of every cell as they contracted. Just simple movements felt worse than even observing the world around him.

Out of desperation, Leonel slowly slung his backpack off of his shoulder. Luckily, when he had been forced to use his coat to bind that girl, he had taken his backpack off and hung it from one arm. If not for this, he didn't think he could manage to do even this simple task.

Taking out a familiar bottle of green sludge, he brought it to his lips, drinking shakily. Unfortunately, he could only feel a wave of despair, remembering that he had finished the rest of it after Coach Owen reminded him to.

Never in his life did he think he'd miss his dad's vomit brew. PANDA-NOVEL.COM

Parched, he still tilted the bottle as far back as he could, licking up the faint drops that touched his tongue. He didn't know if it was because of this sickness that had taken hold of him, or the stress of the past day, or maybe it was just pure frustration, but Leonel's chest welled up with rage, his eyes watering.

'Dad... I miss you.'

Why was any of this happening? Why did the world suddenly collapse? Why was it that his friends wouldn't wake up no matter how hard he shook them?

Leonel laughed self-deprecatingly. How pathetic of him. He didn't know how long he had been out for, but as for how long he had been awake, it was not even a full day, yet he was already breaking down like a fragile baby.

At that moment, something fell from Leonel's tipped bottle and left a paper-cut on his nose, causing him to wince. That was nice to know, apparently his pain was amplified several times over too. A little micro cut and he felt worse than when his ribs had cracked.

With slow movements, Leonel once again lowered his arm, delicately picking up what had fallen. It seemed like a rolled up piece of flexible fabric.

'Wait... Is this paper?'

Leonel was stunned. Paper had been made obsolete a long time ago. In fact, it was all but illegal. Though paper itself wasn't banned, the use of trees and other plant life to manufacture products had been heavily restricted in the Nature Protection Act of 2046. How had his dad gotten his hands on something like this?

In truth, Leonel wouldn't even recognize it had it not been for his robust education. If others knew he had this, both him and his dad would be in a lot of trouble.

However, thinking about the state the world was likely in right now, Leonel couldn't be bothered to care. His wrist watch also no longer had any ability to monitor him.

Using delicate movements, he unfurled the roll of paper, wiping the bits of green sludge that stuck to it away.

'By the time you read this, I'll already be gone.'

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Leonel's heart stopped beating.

“Dad...”

‘Haha! You probably thought I meant I died right? Be honest, you started crying, right?’

Leonel’s mouth hung open for a moment before he started gritting his teeth.

“Damned old man! Don’t let me catch you...”

For a moment, Leonel forgot about his odd sickness. He scolded his father relentlessly, but the smile of relief that hung from his lips was clear.

‘Don’t worry, there’s no one on Earth who can threaten me. Those folks haven’t dared to bother me for a long time already.’

Leonel raised an eyebrow, but he could only keep reading.

‘There’s not much I can tell you here. I was tempted to make like a father in anime and disappear without a word, but I thought you were too much of a crybaby to survive through that.’

Leonel opened his mouth to refute, but remembering the mental breakdown he almost just had, he swallowed his words. In the end, he just laughed, his poor mood dissipating completely.

His dad had always been a big anime fan, they often watched all the oldies together. Still, only he would make such a joke during a time as serious as this.

‘So, I will be quick. ρoοd□□□□□□

‘First, don’t bother trying to wake up your friends. You’ve likely woken up long before them, and they won’t wake up for at least several months. Focus on yourself for now and use your nepotism to your advantage.’

Leonel's expression flickered.

'Don't wonder too much about what I mean by that. Just know that your mother isn't dead, nor has she abandoned you. I also haven't abandoned you. We both love you very much.

'Your body is different from others in this dimension, and the scar across your right hip isn't there by accident either.'

A frown set in on Leonel's brow. He had a faint scar near where his liver would be. But, he hadn't thought about it in a long time. In fact, most people would miss it even if he had his shirt off. He didn't know why his father would mention it now.

But the idea that his mother was alive took over his thoughts. He felt an agitation he hadn't felt in a very long time.

He had faint memories of his mother. His father had never explicitly told him that she had died, so he always assumed that it was to spare his feelings about her death. Or, maybe to spare his own feelings because she had left them.

Hearing the truth, Leonel felt a weight he hadn't even known he was holding onto fall from his shoulders.

'Second, your awakened ability is related to your senses and mind. I don't know the details since I had to suppress it in your youth, but it should be fully bloomed now. It can be overwhelming, but simply meditate until your body reaches equilibrium.'

Leonel blinked. Meditating wasn't complicated, it was just about emptying your mind. The military taught a version that allowed you to sleep and rest your mind while remaining alert.

Leonel's father had learned it while he was a Four-Star General and taught it to him because he was curious. He hadn't used it in years, though.

Without waiting, Leonel tried it, emptying his mind. Slowly, the overwhelming feeling dissipated, replaced by a sharpness that stunned Leonel. Feeling much better, he turned his attention back toward his father's note.

He was shocked by the fact it felt he was reading the words through a magnifying glass. Just what was this 'awakened' ability?

'Third, I've left you two things in the basement. One is the truth behind what is happening here and the second is an heirloom of our Morales Clan. Unfortunately, until the Metamorphosis begins, taking these things out to hand to you directly is too dangerous. So just take it as this old man giving you a little quest.

'Stay safe, son. The trial you'll face now isn't like anything you've faced before. I've taught you some things, but I definitely haven't taught you everything. You'll have an advantage being the first to take it, however with advantages will always come disadvantages.

'Love, dad.'

Leonel sat silently for a long while. He lost count of how many times he re-read his father's words. Unbeknownst to him, he had actually completely memorized it the first time, a fact he didn't realize until maybe the sixth or seventh read through.

His memory had always been good... but it definitely wasn't this good.

Finally, Leonel felt he had wasted enough time. His father said it was an advantage for him to wake up first and that it had somehow happened because his constitution was different from others. At

least that's what he gathered from his words. Since that was the case, sitting here for any longer would be throwing away his good fortune.

Leonel took in his surroundings.

Like everyone else, he was on a crumbled limestone platform that seemed a cross between pale yellow and brown. The pillars that surrounded the platform were severely eroded, most of them not even standing to their formerly full height.

In the four cardinal directions, there were four flights of stairs downward. It seemed that they were atop a temple of some sort. But, what was truly shocking was the fact that beyond this temple, there was nothing but formless space, an endless black without mass or substance.

As though sensing Leonel's intentions, four portals not much different from the spatial tear that brought him here appeared.

None of them seemed to separate themselves from the other. Leonel couldn't tell if this was because they all led to the same place regardless, or if this matter was purposely left to chance.

'The ancient runes are definitely Mayan script. But why would they appear here?'

Gritting his teeth, Leonel put his bag down, switching out his jeans and turtle neck for his gym equipment. He didn't know what was going to happen, but he felt that sweats and compression clothing would be far more helpful to him now.

His gray sweats scrunched at his ankles, his black long-sleeve compression shirt clinging tightly to his toned torso. He felt more free now, he just wished he had had the chance to wash them before he had to wear them again. This smell was terrible.

After hesitating for a moment, he also took out the three-piece silver rod his bicycle was formed out of, screwing them together back into their combined two meter length.

Leonel wasn't exactly a martial arts expert, but he felt for someone as inexperienced as him, having a longer ranged weapon would keep him relatively safer. Whether or not that was true, he didn't know. But, he did know that the frame of this bike was strong enough to withstand his jumping down several meters without giving way. Considering he weighed over 200 pounds, it was definitely a strong material with some heft to it.

Facing a randomly chosen portal, Leonel steeled his heart. However, after a moment, he hesitated again.

Turning to Aina's sleeping form, he gently placed his bag under her head and covered her frail arms with his turtleneck sweater. He couldn't help but smile when her nose scrunched up with disgust, likely catching a whiff of his sport's wear.

He had never been this close to her before. In fact, this was also the first time he had ever touched her. He tried his best not to take advantage of her despite the softness of her supple skin and long black hair.

PANDA-NOVEL Her faint lines of makeup showed signs of fading after so many days. But, Leonel realized that Aina had actually used some tricks to downplay her beauty. He couldn't see it all, but it was enough to grip his heart firmly. He even felt an impulse to wipe off the rest, but he held himself back.

'I hope that you'll show me your true self one day.' He thought to himself silently.

Without another moment of hesitation, he stood and walked to a portal.

'I may not come out from this alive, but at least you'll have something to remember me by.'

Leonel's thoughts sounded morbid, but his heart was more relaxed than it had been in a long time.

Knowing that his father was alive, and that even his mother was too, he felt as light as a feather.

Until he saw them again, until he heard Aina's response, he had no intention of dying.

With that, he took a leap into the whirling pool of blue, vanishing.

The temple he had left behind fell completely silent, the portals shrinking and finally disappearing.

This silence would reign for many more months.