

Dimensional Descent - Chapter 17

Leonel stood frozen, his silver rod gripped tightly in one hand and the bracelet he had traded for Aina in his other. He hardly heard the shrieks of the girls cowering behind James as he watch her use Conrad's own shirt to wipe his blood from her arm.

Aina's gaze didn't ever seem to leave his own. Maybe it was Leonel's own illusion, he wasn't sure.

But what was certain was that Aina made her way over to him. In a series of events that were nothing more than a blur to him, his bag, the one she had been carrying all this time, the very one he had allowed her to use as a pillow, ended up in his hand. The very same hand he held the bracelet in.

The massive battle axe on her seemingly delicate back cast a shadow over his face, dwarfing him completely. Leonel wasn't even consciously aware of what happened next, he only caught small tidbits.

Savahn was too scared to approach Aina anymore. Yuri's demeanor changed with Aina's appearance as though she had never been afraid. The odd world they were in began to tremble. And before Leonel knew it, he was standing on the grass gardens that once surrounded the Northern Dormitories.

All he could think about was Aina's gaze. Her amber, almost golden eyes, peering through his soul. It wasn't particularly cold, nor did it fill him with fear, but there was something deeply unsettling about them, a feeling that set an itch he couldn't reach in his heart.

"Leo! LEO!"

Leonel's eyes flashed as his body shifted to the side. He stuck his silver rod into the soft soil beneath him and used his now free hand to grab to the side.

His reactions were inconceivably quick. He hadn't even seen who attacked him from behind even to this moment. All he had was a frail wrist that almost seemed like it could snap with a single squeeze.

'Strength 0.72?'

Leonel was stunned. Knowing he wouldn't be able to hold on for so with his 0.67 level strength, he used the attacker's momentum against them, pulling on their wrist and sweeping his leg across.

'That's... That's the girl who threw up that day...'

Leonel's white pupil'd underclassman flipped in the air, falling on her back with a resounding thud.

James, who had been the one calling out to Leonel, blinked in shock before smiling bitterly. It seemed his best friend had had his own massive improvements. In fact, with how alert Leonel had been even in a daze just now, he had a feeling that Leonel had suffered more than them all.

Yet, he had somehow managed to keep a bright smile on his face when he came back, only for him to lose that smile due to that event that shocked even James himself. He really didn't know how to

console Leonel.PANDA-NOVEL.COM

'Leonel is too soft... How could he deal with the girl he's chased for five years now being...'

James sighed.

"We can't stay here." Leonel finally pulled himself out of his slump. He knew that this wasn't the time to be sulking.

Grabbing his silver rod, he pressed it to his underclassman's chest, using his leverage to stop her from using her obscene strength.

With a quick glance around, he understood the situation.

Luckily, in the months they had been gone, the white pupil'd mutants had dispersed. But with Leonel's senses, he could hear many of them approaching as though they could grasp their location.

PANDA-NÓVEL Leonel counted the number of people around him, feeling a sudden pang when he realized that the number was much less than it should have been.

"Zavier... He?"

James' jaw clenched. "I entered the Sub-Dimensional Zone with him, Milan and Joel... Zavier didn't make it..."

Leonel's heart beat erratically for a long while before he managed to stop it. There had been over 30 of them in the beginning, but now only 12 remained. In fact, he felt that it could only have been luck that allowed most of them to survive a Zone.

The fiendish struggling beneath the butt of his silver rod caught Leonel's attention, causing him to frown. Before he could react, a flying dagger flew between he and James, entering the girl's throat.

Leonel looked over with a gloomy expression as the girl's life slipped away.

His eyes met Yuri's. She stood beside Aina with her arm raised, her expression nonchalant as though nothing had happened. Aina's gaze had been indifferent, but Yuri's almost held a teasing expression. It was the kind of look that made Leonel's frown deepened. PANDA NÓVEL

"What the hell are you doing?" Leonel asked.

Yuri seemed surprised by Leonel's tone for a moment. Maybe it was because she felt what she had done was only natural. Or, maybe it was because she didn't think that Leonel had such a fierce gaze in him. It was obvious that she wasn't in Senior Class A along with him, or else she would never have such a naive thought.

The only reason Leonel's imposing aura had never come into play to now was because he couldn't pull his will behind killing. But when it came to his instinctual rage, there was nothing holding it back.

Yuri recovered, her expression dialing back to a neutral gaze that almost said 'just wait'.

A moment later, the girl who lay dead beneath Leonel began to glow, turning into motes of light that fused with Yuri.

Leonel hadn't scanned the 'stats' of his friends because it was an instinct he reserved for enemies. But he could faintly feel that Yuri had improved in strength by a small fraction. It was too small of a fraction for Leonel to pinpoint, but he could vaguely feel it.

The reason he kept his 'stats' to just two significant figures was because his senses weren't yet sharp enough to break it down further. If he had to guess, Yuri's improvement was somewhere between 0.0001 and 0.00001.

"Miss Aina believes that it's best we work together in such a dangerous environment, so instead of being offended by your question, I will explain it to you. These white pupil'd people are called Invalids. They're the people who during their awakening were instead 'eaten' by their abilities, failing to fuse with them.

"As a result, they've lost their consciousness, being a humanoid mass of instincts. If they swallow those of us who succeeded, they have a chance to evolve and regain their consciousness. The

[Right now, the next goal of our Empire is to gather you heroes together. Your wrist watches will point you toward the closest center of power in your region. Please head there as quickly and safely as possible so that you can be properly registered. Those who fail to do so will be considered an enemy of the Ascension Empire]

The voice was no longer mechanical. In fact, it was distinctly human. Leonel had heard this very voice before. Many times before, actually. It was the Emperor of the Ascension Empire, Emperor Gervaise Fawkes.

‘They want us to register...? Why would they need that, can’t they already monitor us...? Unless...’

Leonel’s eyes flashed open, a sudden realization overcoming him. It seemed the forceful tweaks the Empire made to their technology weren’t exactly perfect quite yet. Maybe they still weren’t aware that Leonel was the first to enter and clear a Zone either.

As expected, what their oh-so noble Emperor left them wasn’t a true map but rather simply pointed toward a direction, much like the Tier 4 Black detector Leonel had for Sub-Dimensional Zones. The Ascension Empire had always been touchy about distributing maps.

Once the announcement was finished, Leonel looked back over toward Yuri and Aina. However this time, he didn’t spare Yuri a glance.

“If you’d like to work with me, then the orders we follow are mine. Are we clear on this?”

Yuri frowned and seemed to want to respond, but Aina’s delicate hand blocked her.

“Yes. That isn’t a problem. You seem to have strong sensory abilities, it’s only right that you lead.”

Leonel so very rarely heard Aina speak, but her voice was just as angelic as he remembered. He still couldn’t wrap his mind around her actions. How could he like a girl who treated lives so casually?

He knew well what Conrad had done. Maybe to some he deserved death. But Leonel just had a hard time crossing that line. Maybe he was a hypocrite for it, but it was just how he felt.

Hearing these words, Leonel stuffed the bracelet into the ragged pockets of his sweats. He turned his body away, not replying.

“You alright, Leo?” James whispered to his side.

“I’m fine.” Leonel said with a bitter smile. “Don’t worry about me... I think I’ve already been through worse.”

James patted his shoulder and didn’t say much more.

“Alright.” Leonel raised his voice once more. “The... Invalids aren’t far from us already. But I think it’s important that I get a read on your abilities before we move out. Mine seem to be categorized as heightened senses, so I’ll do my best to lead you out while avoiding as many battles as possible.”

James who had almost always been able to read Leonel even without a cue spoke next.

“My and Milan’s abilities are very similar, it’s how we survived in the Zone. Milan can form a strong shield that can block up to ten C-grade attacks and one B-grade attack before failing. He needs three seconds to form it. And he can form three total before he needs to rest. He also has improved strength beyond normal levels.

“I also gained this strength boost and a similar shield. But, I have two separate shields. One can absorb attacks. The other can repel attacks. My shield has an effective range of five meters and form a dome. Milan’s form a semi-sphere and has a range of three meters.

“I can vary the strength of my shield as well. A one second shield can block two C-grade attacks. A ten second shield can absorb or repel ten B-grade attacks or one A-grade attack.

“The last point is just that my absorb shield replenishes my stamina. The reflective shield is self-explanatory.”

Leonel’s brows cocked, pleasantly surprised. Milan’s ability was probably graded as a C, but James’ was at least an A. From what he could tell as well, Milan’s strength was a 0.59, but James’ was a 0.75. The difference was stark.

Milan laughed jovially, albeit self-deprecatingly.

“Seems I’m a little lacking in comparison.”

James grinned, wrapping his arm around Milan’s neck and giving the big guy a noogie.

“You’re not alone.” Joel laughed lifting up a pole arm that was just over two meters long. “My ability is related to sharpness, I think. I can add a decent bit of piercing power to the weapons I use, which is why I chose this F-grade pike as a reward.”

Joel was a Three-Star Linebacker for their Royal Blues. He had dark skin and kind brown eyes. But when he was on the field, many maligned him as a head hunter for his vicious hits.

Leonel could tell that Joel’s coordination ‘stat’ was 0.65. Definitely far above average.

With that, Leonel went through everyone one by one, calmly memorizing their abilities.

Finally, he got to Yuri and Aina.

“My ability is related to marksmanship with a small bit of telekineses.” Yuri explained calmly. “I can improve the accuracy and strength of my throwing knives with my mind. And... I can also retrieve them.”

The dagger she had thrown earlier, still stabbed into the grass, trembled before flying back into her hand obediently.

“Miss Aina’s ability is an overall exponential boost to her physical abilities whether that be speed, agility, reactions, and especially strength.”

These were words Leonel most definitely didn’t doubt...

[Aina Brazinger]

[Speed: 0.85; Agility: 0.80; Coordination: 0.95; Stamina: 0.95; Reactions: 0.97]

...

[Strength: 0.99]