

Dimensional Descent - Chapter 21

“... Aina?”

Leonel suddenly remembered that before he sensed that seven A-grade Invalids, he had also caught the faint fluctuation of someone or something else. But he had lost track of it near immediately. Could that have been Aina?

But if it was, should he feel bitter about the fact she hadn't raised a hand to help him to now?

These thoughts didn't survive very long because though Aina tried to hide it, his senses were much too sharp. He saw that not only was she not in top form currently, but there were small specks of dirt, blood and grime in hard to find areas. There was no way Aina had rolled out of bed like that.

Aina turned back and looked up at Leonel.

“Why did you leave without a word? I already said that it's not safe to work alone.”

Hearing these words, Leonel instinctually frowned.

“Are you sure it was you who said that? Or was it your servant Yuri?”

Leonel was shocked by the own snappiness in his voice. But the mixture of resentment and fatigue left him unable to control his emotions very well.

It really had been Yuri who said that her 'Miss Aina' wanted to work together. Those words had never come out of Aina's own mouth. Why should he care about something she couldn't even be bothered to say personally? He was more surprised she hadn't sent her little servant here instead.

“Both.” Aina replied with a glare. “You’re our leader, you can’t recklessly leave on your own. Even if you did it to protect us, don’t you think your own safety is important too? If you fall, do you think they would be able to survive for long?!”

These were the most words Leonel had ever heard Aina speak. However, even if he was stunned, he had far more pent up rage that suppressed it completely.

Just as he wanted to respond, a snicker came from a few meters away.

“It’s fine if you two want to have a lover’s quarrel, but do so after you meet my demands. That ax on your back looks pretty good girl. You can hand it over too.”

Aina’s head snapped back to the three men..PANDA-NÖVEL.COM

“Shut the hell up while I’m talking or you’ll find yourselves split in half before you can regret it!”

Leonel’s gaze trembled at those words. He didn’t even have time to register the shock he should have felt about them coming from Aina’s mouth. Was this the same shy girl who ran away every time he confessed? The same quiet girl who spoke so few words before?

“How can you keep treating human lives so casually?!”

Aina’s head snapped back toward Leonel. “Can’t you tell that they want to kill you?! Do you really believe that they’ll just back away after all of this?! They saw you kill an A-grade Invalid on your own, you think they want that kind of enemy getting away from them?! Why are you so naive?!”

Leonel’s eyes bulged, reddening in a torrent of uncontrollable anger.

“Did you see that?” One of the leading man’s partners pointed. “That’s got to be one of the most beautiful women I’ve ever seen. She’s probably one of those noble girls from a big family... I really want to taste one.”

It seemed that since Aina immediately faced Leonel when she fell by his side, and the fact her massive ax covered her back view, it wasn't until she turned to curse at them that they got a true look at her.

"She really does look good... You got first dibs last time, though. It's my turn."

"No way! She smells like a virgin, I can catch the whiff from here. She's much higher quality than the last one."

The leader cut in, licking his lips. "Let's use the usual method to decide."

"Fine! Rock-paper-scissors it is."

"Ready —."

The night sky fell into a greater darkness. For a moment, it felt that even the moon above was eclipsed, the bloody, murderous intent suffocating even its beauty.

PANDA-NÓVEL The three men turned toward Leonel, terrified expressions on their faces. PANDA NÓVEL

"I dare you to say another word about her."

Leonel's eyes, already fueled by his other burning emotions, had almost completely turned a blood red. His whites were swarmed by snaking blood vessels, and his irises, once a gentle hazel, blackened completely.

They simply didn't deserve to live.

Leonel's muscles flexed so strongly that his dislocated shoulder snapped back into place. Ignoring the twanging pain, he reached to his back and pulled out three darts.

What happened next could only be considered a blur. Three flying silver spears. Three cries for help.

Three bloody holes. Three dead corpses.

Even after the deed was done, Leonel was still livid.

Aina sent a glance toward him, her emotions once more unreadable. She walked forward and took the treasures they had kept on their bodies and walked back while Leonel was still in a blinded rage.

“Oof...!”

A tiny fist smashed against Leonel’s chest, causing him to stumble backward and fall to the ground in his fatigue. If it wasn’t for his flexible armor, his ribs would have probably broken.

Leonel looked up to find Aina. He obviously knew that she was the one responsible, but he was too tired to do much about it. He simply met her gaze, huffing and puffing.

“These are only D-grade, but they’re still better than using your bike as a weapon like that.”

A pile of treasures fell from her small arms. There were three weapons, a shield, and three armors for various body parts. Of the armors, one was for the shins, another was a helmet, and the last was a chest protector. As for the weapons, there was a pike, a sword and finally a spear.

Leonel didn’t answer, getting the first good look at Aina he had in almost a year. Even when he came back from the Mayan temple, he hadn’t had a chance before her arm was suddenly through Conrad’s chest.

Looking at her now, he still couldn’t fuse her image with the devil of her that had been growing in his mind. Her features were too delicate, too beautiful, for her to be that same woman who all but ripped a man’s heart out with her bare hands. ρ□□□□□□□□

Her body was fitted in a deep black militaristic outfit. There were many pockets and belts that surrounded her figure, still doing just as bad a job at hiding her curves as her dresses had. Her long black hair flowed loosely in the wind, disappearing into its folds from time to time.

Somehow, her amber eyes seemed closer to gold than they had been before. Whether that was his imagination, or the objective reality, Leonel wasn't sure.

Leonel smiled bitterly, realizing why he had avoided observing her closely over the past few days.
His heart... It still beat wildly.

"... Leave the rest of the things for the others. I'll take the spear and shield..."

"Also, thank you. I didn't consider enough that if there were A-grade Invalids around drawn in by the Zone opening, there would definitely be other Invalids as well."

Aina's expression softened at these words, but she didn't say anything in response.

"Let's head back." Leonel slowly picked himself off of the ground.

"We can't." Aina suddenly said. "As you said, the Zone is pulling in Invalids. Until it's closed, getting out of this area will be difficult. Invalids have far sharper senses than we do in exchange for their weaker intelligence. They can sense a Zone from tens of miles away and will slowly converge."

Leonel frowned. He most definitely wasn't in a state to be entering a Zone right now.

"Here." Aina handed him something that looked like a pill. She had pulled it out from one of the many pockets she had.

Leonel raised an eyebrow. He hadn't been able to sense something with such dense energy despite Aina standing right in front of him. It seemed her pockets weren't normal.

There wasn't any skepticism in Leonel's thoughts. He took the pill from her, careful not to touch her soft palm, and swallowed it.

A fire lit down his throat, coursing through his body as through it was a racetrack.

The wound on his left shoulder rapidly sealed, and even the soreness in his right vanished. Finally, his fatigue trickled away as though he had just taken a good nap.

[Leonel Morales]

[Strength: 0.80; Speed: 0.75 (+0.1); Agility: 0.85 (+0.1); Coordination: 0.99; Stamina: 0.86 (+0.05); Reactions: 0.99; Spirit: 0.10]

A flash of energy raged around Leonel's body. A barrier that had blocked him crumbled and he felt his spirit shoot upward.

[Spirit: 0.11]

It was a small change, but Leonel felt that it made a world of difference.

Just what kind of pill was that? Almost all his stats had ticked up by 0.05. Leonel wasn't a fool. He knew this pill was more valuable than Aina let on. Even putting his life on the line against the metal Invalid wasn't as good.

"Take care of yourself from now on." Aina said. "This pill only works once."

"Thanks." Leonel said absentmindedly.

"We can go now. Yuri will find this place after we've gone."

"Shouldn't we wait for them, then? It's not far, we're already less than 50 meters from them."

After he said this, Leonel mumbled under his breath. "I've already made the mistake of entering a Zone without enough numbers before."

Aina's senses were sharper than he gave them credit for. Her brows raised in shock at these words unbeknownst to him.

"No. The Zone is an S-grade Zone with a two person limit. I have a detection device that has 95% accuracy on Zones below the SS-grade."

"Alright then." Leonel didn't question it. Aina and him were without a doubt the two most powerful of their group. It only made sense for them to enter.

It didn't take long for the two to cross the 500-meter distance to the Zone, having not spoken a single word to the other.

The density of Invalids had been growing, but with Leonel's senses, if they wanted to avoid them, it wasn't a problem. The target of the Invalids was never the Zone itself, but rather the humans it would attract. And, with their lack of intelligence, they didn't know to wait directly outside of the whirling blue portal.

Unlike the portal that dragged them in so many months prior, this portal didn't have a suction effect. It sat hovering in the air silently, not disturbing the area at all.

If he wasn't certain before, Leonel was now that there was something fundamentally different about the first Zone they were sent into. Maybe if he entered this time, the subtle up-ticks in his stats would continue instead of pausing like it had last time.

After taking Aina's pill, Leonel realized something. That burning feeling... It was exactly like the green vomit his dad made him drink everyday for 17 years. What if the slow increases in his stats

wasn't because of the normal evolution of his body as Earth tended toward the Fourth Dimension,
but was rather thanks to his father?

Leonel and Aina simultaneously leaped from a perch high up, falling into the Zone that swirled shut behind them. In their absence, the Invalids lost track of the scent that had converged them and they began to slowly disperse.

[Sub-Dimensional Zone detected: Merlin's Prophecy. Joan of Arc. Jeanne d'Arc]

[Sub-Dimensional Zone grade: A]

[Clear requirements: Aid Joan of Arc in repelling the English Army]

[Side Quest: Unable to detect. Scope of system too limited]

[Reward: Unable to detect. Scope of system too limited]

[It is recommended that subject, Leonel Morales, complete this quest with a minimum of seven other individuals. Subject's D-grade ability is too low]

'Eight person limit?...' Leonel shook his head.

The voice of Leonel's wrist watch sounded in his mind, but he ignored it in the end. Compared to Aina's detection treasure, it was too inferior. There was no need to take any of it seriously. It couldn't even get the S-grade correct. Last time it had predicted the Mayan temple was an F-grade Zone until he ran into the Priest and it upped it to the C-grade.

Plus, he didn't really have the luxury to think about it even if he wanted to.

He and Aina appeared in a small village filled with dusted roads. But, considering the burning cottages and huts around them, not to mention the sound of screaming and clanking swords, it was under attack.

There was only one thing Leonel did trust his wrist watch about. This was likely France and their quest most definitely had something to do with that legendary woman.