

Dimensional Descent - Chapter 4

James grabbed his helmet with both hands, dropping to his knees in despair. At a time like this,
Leonel could only sigh.

However, under the silence of the arena, a resounding boom of two clashing bodies sounded.

Leonel grimaced, feeling his already fractured ribs break cleanly as his vision was filled with sights of
the moon above.

It was then a loud whistle blew through the silence.

“Unnecessary roughness, roughing the passer, number 21. Half the distance to the goal, still first
down.”

Leonel landed heavily on the ground, grasping at his chest with his eyes squinting in pain.

The rookie stood over him in shock. At first, he had let his frustration get the best of him. He had never for a moment thought that James would drop such an easy layup of a pass, so he unleashed everything he had on Leonel, knowing they would lose the game. Never did he think that his actions would give the Royal Blues another chance with zero seconds on the clock.

The medics rushed onto the field. Despite the Royal Blues gaining new life, the stadium still remained silent. The sight of Leonel writhing in pain made many send furious gazes toward the rookie and James.

“Bennett, get the hell off the field! Rook, you’re in.”

Coach Owen coldly benched his Five-Star prospect. He didn't know what was wrong with James today, but he was clearly in his own head too much. It was impossible to use him for this final play.

The medics quickly lifted Leonel's jersey, undoing the bandage wraps from the first half to reveal ghastly purple and green bruises. It was simply impossible for a bruise to spread so quickly. The only explanation was that Leonel had suffered this injury very early on in the game.

"Don't." Leonel grabbed the hand of the middle-aged male medic who tried to take his pads off.

"There's just one play left, I got it."

Coach Owen who had rushed onto the field frowned deeply, his arms crossed over his well-built chest and his mustache billowing.

The team stood around Leonel's slowly rising figure, solemn expressions on their faces. They knew that everyone made mistakes, but at the moment, they were having a really hard time forgiving

James • PANDA-NOVEL.COM

"What are you all pouting for? An injury timeout doesn't last forever, let's do this. Line up!"

Seeing Leonel's resolute attitude, the medics and Coach Owen had no choice but to jog off the field under the silence of the crowd. In those moments, the heavy breathing of the players who stood on their last legs was all that remained hanging in the air.

Leonel's fiery gaze lit a fire under them all, filling them with a strength they didn't know they had.

On the sidelines, Conrad looked on with a gloomy expression. Victory had been in his grasp, yet it slipped away, just like that.

Leonel slapped his hands together, standing behind his offensive line as though he wasn't injured at all.

“Blue 80. BLUE 80. Down set, HUT!”

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Leonel sat in the locker room breathing heavily. The sounds of celebration surrounded him, causing a light smile to play his handsome features. Who knew how they did it, but the guys managed to get their hands on a few dozen champagne bottles. Their wrist watches were probably beeping away with talks of the Underage Drinking Code.

Unfortunately, he couldn't take part too actively. Though he could forcibly ignore his pain if need be as he did on the final game winning play, it was probably best he didn't move too actively, lest his ribs puncture his lungs.

“Stop moaning and groaning, cap. You're not getting out of partying tonight!”

One of Leonel's O-lineman, Three-Star Center Milan Inga, slapped his shoulder without regard for his grimace. He swung back a flask of vodka, his massive fat covered body somehow appearing ripped of muscle at the same time.

“Oof, I already promised I'd come. No need to kill me first.”

The guys laughed, hopping in the showers one after another. PANDA NOVEL

Leonel gingerly took off his sweaty pads and undergarments, taking his time. He planned on hopping into the showers last. Although he was pretty certain that Aina wouldn't come, he still had to put his best foot forward just in case. Luckily, he had already prepared a decent outfit. It wasn't as flashy as what those rich boys could bring out, but he was still happy with it.

‘I'll probably have to have one of the medics re-bandage this for me.’ Leonel thought to himself.

Hearing a sudden plop by his side, Leonel turned from his locker to see his coach half dozing off, a strong scent of alcohol leaking from his mouth.

Leonel laughed. "Coach, you're gonna get yourself fired going around like this."

"Bah, fuck those preppy pricks." Coach Owen tipped his flask up as though mockingly toasting the very people he insulted. Leonel almost didn't understand his slurring words.

"Look at you, how embarrassing. You get like this every year."

"What's it to you? You're gone after this time anyway, off to the bright lights of the NAFL. This old man will just stay in his little town."

"Pft." Leonel couldn't hold back his laugh. "You're the coach of the best Academy football program on Union Continent. Your salary is enough to retire now and live a life of luxury until you finish putting that other foot in the grave."

Usually, Coach Owen's mustache would blow and he'd have another witty comeback waiting for Leonel. But this time, his response was completely unexpected.

"... Thanks for choosing Royal Blue, kid."

Leonel was stunned silent for a moment. He very well could have chosen Angel Wing, allowing him to attend the second ranked Academy. But, he chose Royal Blue because he liked Coach Owen's straight forward personality. As for the first ranked Academy, they didn't have a football program, seeing the entertainment path as something beneath them.

In the end, Leonel smiled lightly. "Don't thank me, thank that dead rat on your lip. If not for how fun it is to poke fun at it, I would have never come here."

Coach Owen laughed uproariously, slapping Leonel's back even harder than Milan had. ρ□□□□□□□□

“Finish drinking that green vomit your old man gave you, kid.”

Ignoring Leonel’s grimace of pain, Coach Owen walked away.

“... Enjoy it while you can...”

Leonel was too busy trying to calm his pain with ice to hear Coach Owen’s last words. But, they were never intended for him to hear to begin with.

After his pain pangs slowly faded, Leonel dug through his locker to find his black bag. Pulling a familiar bottle of green sludge out.

As far as Leonel knew, his father worked in a government division that focused on nutrition and enhanced nutritional supplements. The Ascension Empire believed that while their technology advanced rapidly, the human condition lagged behind. So this unnamed division worked toward maximizing human potential with food.

This gross concoction was one of his father’s creations. According to his Gene Assessment, he was slotted in to grow to six feet tall. But, after drinking this poison everyday, he superseded that by three inches and might very well gain another inch or two by the time he reached his twenties.

Of course, Leonel’s father was actually a Four-Star General. He only went on to work in this unnamed division after he retired from military service. Then he proceeded to retire once more from said division.

After chugging what remained of the bottle, a familiar scorching pain seared Leonel’s chest. But, at the very least, his aching ribs dulled down a bit. It would probably take a normal person about two months to heal, but Leonel would only need about three weeks.

Time ticked by and Leonel was finally the only one remaining. Though he could have used the 'Refresh' ability of his watch, he preferred taking a shower as did most people. There was just something about it that felt cleaner.

Taking his time, he scrubbed every inch of his body before walking out with a towel around his waist and one hanging loosely over his head. Slightly obscured with a pattern of green, purple and brown bruises, his torso rippled beneath the heated steam.

Leonel rubbed the towel through his hair, wincing as he struggled to keep his arms above his head.

Reaching into his locker, he put on a pair of deep blue jeans, a skin-tight white turtle-neck sweater, and draped over a long black trench coat.

'It's only 8 pm right now, dad won't kill me too much if I'm home by midnight...'

Leonel slung his backpack over his shoulder. But the moment he turned, his footsteps stopped.

"What are you moping around for?" Leonel smiled toward James.

"I..."

"If it's a struggle for you to tell me, then just don't tell me. There's no need for you to be sorry, that rookie would have hit me like that whether you caught the ball or not."

"..."

For a while James didn't know what to say. But, he didn't move out of the way of the door either.

"... You knew you would get the unnecessary roughness call, right?"

Leonel's smile dimmed a bit, but he didn't respond.

“I know you too well. You don’t like to lose, but you’re too soft-hearted to call me out on my bullshit too. So, you’d find a way to protect our friendship and ignore it, all while winning the big game anyway. Am I right?”

Leonel sighed. “Is there really a need to know the answer?”

“Of course there is!” James’ voice rose. “If you knew I needed your help, why couldn’t you just lose this one time?! This is just a game, isn’t it? You’ve already won three times, did you really need to win for a fourth? You don’t even want to be a quarterback!”

PANDA-NOVEL Leonel’s gaze narrowed. “Whether I want to or not is irrelevant. In everything that you do —.”

“I already know! I’ve heard it a million times. Respect and persistence. Respecting this garbage hand you were dealt, you’re definitely the first. Congratulations!”

Leonel’s eyes flickered with a hint of sadness.

“James, why are you being like this? You didn’t even try to talk to me beforehand, we could have come up with a solution together. Did you think using being late to class as an excuse was enough?”

James’ expression rapidly changed, flaring with anger, then shame, then finally, capitulation.

“... I’m sorry. I lost my cool. There are just some things that... Never mind. It doesn’t matter anymore. What’s done is done.”

James shook his head, recollecting himself.

Turning away, James reached for the door. After a pause, he turned back with a bright smile as though nothing had happened.

“Come on, all your adoring fans are waiting outside to crucify me. The party’s going down in Blue North Dormitory. We gotta get there before all the booze’s gone.”

Before Leonel could respond, James ripped open the door, unleashing a sound wave of flashing cameras and the shrieks of groupies.

In the NAFL, reporters were allowed into the locker rooms. But, since they were minors and the bigwigs were worried about optics, they were forced to wait outside at the Academy level.

At the same time, Royal Blue Academy’s campus was usually locked down from outsiders, but there were rare occasions like today where those who paid obscene amounts of money or had appropriate connections could come.

Like this, Leonel was forced to wade through a sea of reporters and fan girls with a bitter smile on his face, James’ sinister laugh sounding off in the distance as he ran away.