

## Dimension Master

### #Chapter 1: New Game - Read Dimension Master Chapter 1: New Game

#### **Chapter 1: 1: New Game**

"Who's driving tomorrow? My car is still in the shop. I know it's supposed to be my turn, but I don't have my car back. I can pay for gas if you want me to," Mike asked, leaning on his locker. Chad and Drake were standing next to him, stuffing their books in their own locker. It was the end of the school day, so they were preparing to head home.

The three friends usually took turns driving the others to school to save gas. Each of the boys lived on the same street, making it easy for them to share the driving. There was no sense in all three driving separately.

Slamming his locker closed, Drake looked up at Mike. "I can drive." He offered. "You can take one of my turns after you get your car back, so it will be fair."

Mike was the tallest of the three friends, reaching six feet two inches. He had soft brown eyes and chocolate brown hair that looked like mocha coffee. His black t-shirt stretched tightly on his athletic frame. It was something he was proud of. He worked out hard during football practice and spent a lot of time in the weight room at his school. He was also the oldest of his friends; he was 17 by only a month. The other two were 16. Being the largest of the group, he towered over the other two.

Chad was the shortest of the three. He was only five feet five inches. He didn't like being the shortest, always hoping he would go through a growth spurt. Like Mike, he was athletic. He was an archer, so he wasn't large. His body was covered in hard, lean muscle. He spent most of his time practicing. Since he was on the school's archery team, he was able to practice whenever he wanted. He was an excellent shot.

Drake was different from his two friends. He was five feet seven inches with silky black hair and bright emerald green eyes that looked like shimmering gems. He always wore a large T-shirt that made his thin frame look even thinner. There was no muscle to speak of. Unlike his two friends, he preferred video games rather than sports.

"Yeah, I can take one of your turns to pay you back," Mike responded.

Chad stayed quiet. He wasn't much of a talker. He was the last one to finish putting his books away. He stepped back and waited. Drake, seeing that his friend was finished, headed down the long hallway that led out of the school grounds. Mike and Chad followed close behind.

Although Drake was frail in appearance compared to his friend, he was a natural leader. Something about him makes others want to follow him. Of course, it helped that he was a genius.

Drake looked back at Chad. "Didn't you have your archery stuff this morning?"

Chad stuffed his hands in his pockets, continuing toward the double doors that led outside. "I already put them in my car."

"Are you going to play that new game tonight?" It was Mike who asked. Drake wasn't like the others. He was the only one who played video games, and he wasn't into sports. Mike strived to include Drake in conversations, so he always tried to ask about his gaming.

Drake grinned. "Yeah, it looks cool. I set it up this morning, but haven't played it yet."

Drake pulled the door to the school open, holding it open for his two friends to walk through. They stepped past him and continued toward Chad's car.

Mike sighed, seeing that Drake wasn't going to elaborate. He knew that Drake got a new game, but had no clue about what the game was. He wanted to make Drake feel like he was interested, although he really wasn't. "So, what's the game like?"

Drake perked up. He enjoyed talking about his games. He wasn't oblivious to the fact that his friend was only asking because he was trying to be nice. He decided to answer anyway. "Well, you build your character, then you jump through a portal and fight monsters. This one is a little different. All the character options are human. All my others have elves and mages and stuff."

Chad stopped walking. "That's weird. What's the point of a game if you can't pick something really cool?"

It was clear that Chad didn't play many games. He only knew of a couple, and those all had magical races in them. Drake's new game did not. At least not in the character options. He didn't have much time to see if there were any in the game a NPCs.

Shaking his head, Chad continued to his car.

Fishing his keys out of his pocket, he looked over at Drake. "What's it called?"

Drake waited for Chad to open the door, and he and Mike got in. Drake soon followed. He didn't answer his friend until they were already driving out of the parking lot of the school.

"It's called 'Dimension Master'." Drake shrugged. He didn't elaborate or give any further information.

Mike looked back at him. "Aren't you going to tell us more?"

"Well, I don't really know much about it. I haven't played it yet. All I know is you form a party or cohort, whatever you want to call it, then go into the dimension. I haven't figured out anything else yet. If I can play the game tonight, I will know enough to explain more tomorrow."

When the trio arrived at their street, Drake was the first one to get dropped off. When he entered his house, there wasn't anyone home. Running up the stairs and into his room, he tossed his backpack on the bed and went to the computer.

"Time to play," he grinned.

Sitting down in his gaming chair, he pulled his headphones on and got ready to play.

"Ok, first things first. Create my character, then add supporting characters for my cohort."

What confused him was that he had to create cohort members, too. Usually, you just team up with other players. This new game was different. Reading the screen in front of him, he found he had to create at least two cohort members.

Drake didn't have much imagination when it came to the human characters, so he created his main character to resemble himself and his two mandatory cohort members to resemble his two friends. When he was finished, it looked like he and his friends were in the game.

The strange part about the game was that in the character development, it didn't give him anything. It was just an unarmed human that looked like him. He didn't even have a backpack or something to carry loot. He was surprised to find that he was able to put the same style of clothes on his characters that he and his friends actually wore in real life.

Once he had his cohort characters complete, he moved on to the actual playing. Pressing for the game play to start, it set all three of his characters in the middle of a field. There was a swirling dimension portal in the center. Moving his character toward the portal, his small cohort automatically followed him. He didn't have to try to control all of them. They acted on their own.

After making his own character step through the portal, his cohort followed, and the dimensional portal disappeared.

His computer monitor showed scenery that resembled a clearing with a forest surrounding it. There was nothing else on the screen.

"I guess I should just move around. This is an open-world game, so I'll explore."

He tried to move his character forward, but the game wouldn't let him. He watched the three figures on the screen. They looked around and at each other as if they weren't sure what was going on. He could do nothing else.

"This sucks! What the heck am I supposed to do? It won't let me do anything!"

Drake took off his headphones and tossed them on the desk. Looking at the box, it came in, he found no instructions or information on the game. It showed three shadowed figures standing in front of the portal, just like his cohort was. The name of the game was above the three figures. Turning the box around, he read the very short description written on the back.

**He read the back:** *Dimension Master, your key to an open world where you will fight magical beasts, collect loot, and grow your cohort's power. Find the hidden quests for real-world rewards.*

"That's it? How did I not notice that was all that's written?" Drake couldn't understand why the description was so short. It didn't tell him anything. He also couldn't figure out how to move his characters in the game. "How the heck am I supposed to play if I can't do anything!"

Switching the monitor off in frustration, he gave up. "I'll try again tomorrow."

## **Chapter 2: 2: It's the Same**

Drake waited in front of Mike's house, waiting for him to come out of the house. He could see Chad walking across the street to get in the car. He had a backpack slung over one shoulder, his archery equipment affixed to the side. In one hand, he held a tumbler of coffee.

Mike's front door opened, and he came out as Chad was getting in the car.

Chad waited for Mike to get in the car before he spoke. "So, did you play that game last night?"

Disappointment washed over Drake's features. "No," he grumbled. "I got everything set up and went to the portal to start playing, but once in, I couldn't get my character to move. All three of them looked around and at each other as if they didn't know what to do. I tried everything. They won't move."

Mike's brow raised. "All THREE of them? Why would you have three characters?"

Drake sighed as he pulled out onto the street. "This game was weird to set up. You have your character, then you have to create two or more cohort characters. I created the minimum." Drake started to chuckle. "I created us."

For some reason, this caught Chad's attention. He leaned forward in his seat. "Us?"

"Yeah. The character options are all humans. You can change hair color, body build. You can even choose clothes. I created all three of us. When you look at the screen, it looks like we're all in the game."

Chad sat back in his seat. "I think I would like to come to your house to see it for myself. That sounds weird but kind of cool."

Mike nodded in agreement. "Yeah, that's one of those things that you have to see for yourself."

Drake kept driving. He couldn't help but smile at the fact that, for once, his friends were showing real interest in his games. Normally, they would ask questions for his benefit rather than theirs. It seemed that for once, they really were interested.

With his mind occupied with his friend's interest, Drake didn't see the cat on the side of the road until it was too late. It dashed in front of his car. When he saw it in front of him, he tensed up and yanked the wheel, trying to avoid hitting the cat.

The car went flying over the shoulder of the road, slamming into the ditch, then bouncing up. He was a new driver, so he didn't think to start trying to slow down. The car flew out of the ditch and into the field.

The field was full of wheat ready to be harvested. The stalks flew by like golden waves. Drake slammed on the brakes, but nothing happened. The car kept going.

Chad had his bow held tightly in one hand, and the other was pressed against the seat. It appeared he was more interested in protecting his bow than himself.

Mike had his arms stretched out, trying to prevent as much movement as possible.

The car kept going. It was only luck that the wheat field was so large. They wouldn't hurt anyone as they plowed their way through the wheat.

Drake kept slamming his foot on the brake over and over again, trying to get the brakes to work. The car was starting to slow down, but not by much. The brakes weren't working. It was the tall wheat in the field that was slowing the car down.

"Stop. Damn it!" Drake yelled. "Fucking Stop!"

As the car slowed bit by bit, the clear sky above began to cloud over. Dark gray clouds swiftly blanketed the sky. A bolt of lightning shot in front of them. The sky roared in anger as the thunder rolled across the sky. Fat water began to fall, sheets of rain so thick that it was difficult to see through, making it even harder to see out the windshield.

The car parted the wheat like waves, slowly slowing down. It was in small increments. The youths could only hope that they would come to a stop before they reached the other end of the field.

Lightning shot from the sky. The thunder roared as the rain washed over them. Drake fought the wheel, trying to have some measure of control over the car. It was working, but only a little.

Another flash of lightning shot in front of them. A sudden flash of light followed, spreading out, forming a long disk. The car was slower, but not slow enough. It resembled the dimensional portal in Drake's new game. He tried to swerve to avoid it. The wheel wouldn't turn. The car was determined to go through it.

The car shot through the disk of light. The swirling energy suddenly faded after the body of the car was completely through. Drake's foot was still pressed to the brakes. The brakes suddenly worked, forcing the car to skid to a stop. The boys froze. All three of them were breathing hard from panic at what had just happened.

Silence washed over them. They were all in shock.

Lifting his head, Drake peered out the window. They were in a clearing with forest all around them. It was familiar. "What the fuck!" he gasped out loud.

Mike looked over at him. "What happened? Where are we?"

Chad's face was pale. He didn't say anything.

Drake looked back at Mike. "This...This is where the portal brought us to," he said in shock. "It's the same. We're in the same place."

"What do you mean?" Mike asked, not following.

Drake opened the car door, grabbed his backpack off the seat, and stepped out. His friends followed. Chad was still holding his bow and quiver. It was his security blanket.

"What do you mean?" Mike repeated.

"Bring your backpacks...Just in case." Drake advised. Then studied their clothes. "It's...It's the same."

"What do you fucking mean!?" Mike growled.

Drake turned and looked at his friends. "The game. My character walked through a portal, and this," he said, sweeping his hand around him, indicating their surroundings were the start of the game. "Our clothes...The ones our characters are wearing in the

game. It's the same as what clothes we are wearing now. I think I understand the back of the box now. The game was the key to getting us here."

Chad looked over in Drake's direction, still holding his bow tightly. What exactly did the back of the box say?"

Drake recited what he could remember. It wasn't hard. There wasn't much to remember. "Dimension Master, your key to an open world where you will fight magical beasts, collect loot, and grow your cohort's power. Find the hidden quests for real-world rewards."

Mike paced a few times before stopping and looking at Drake. "I still don't understand. You're the smart one. What does it mean?"

Drake sucked in a breath. "It means that the game 'Dimension Master' was not a game. It was a key to get to this dimension. I think that the reason I couldn't move my characters was that they were the key to getting ourselves in." Drake paused for a moment, thinking before he continued with his interpretation. "In this world, we will need to fight magical beasts. I think, like in a game, they will drop loot. I'm not sure about that yet. According to the box. We need to figure out the hidden quests and since it references the real world. I think we can find our way out of here. I also think, but I'm not sure, that the loot and anything else we gain, we can take back with us. The downside is that since we are physically here. I think we can die here. Unlike a game, there's no reset button."

Chad remained quiet, taking in everything Drake said. Mike emptied his backpack of all his school items, leaving his lunch inside. "I think we need to prepare to stay here a while. We need to make room for whatever we find that will help us survive."

Chad nodded, then both he and Drake did the same. Chad didn't take any chances and kept his hand firmly on his bow. The part about fighting magical beasts scared the shit out of him. Drake opened the trunk of the car and filled his school bag with water. The others split the rest between their own packs. They didn't want to run out. Drake kept bottled water in the trunk of his car. The boys were able to store all the water that was in the car.

The Trio stepped away from the car and looked toward the forest. Drake pointed ahead of them, in the same direction the car was facing. "This is the direction our avatars were facing in the game. I think that means that's the direction we need to go."

They took several steps in that direction. They scanned the wooded area, trying to decide the best course of action. Turning to give the car one last look... They were shocked to find that it was no longer there.

### **Chapter 3: 3: First Kill**



The forest in front of the three friends loomed over them. The twin suns were high on the horizon. There were no signs of beasts that could be seen through the thick trees just yet. The three youths didn't know what they were supposed to do when they came across them to begin with. They were not given any information at this point except what was written on the game's box that this place resembled.

Chad had his bow strung, an arrow notched, ready to shoot if a beast decided to show itself. Mike was tense, scanning their surroundings. He glanced over at Drake.

"So, Drake...You're the gamer. Do you know what we're supposed to do?"

Drake walked in the center of the group with his friends flanking each side of him. Thinking about the answer he needed to give his friend, he took in a shaky breath as he scanned the area for danger. In all his games, there was danger everywhere, and it could show itself at any moment.

"I'm surprised we don't have a system. If this is really like a game, we should have one. Of course, we may have one already, but there's just nothing to show. I know that all games have an objective. We know from the game's box that this place resembles; we have to fight magical beasts and find hidden quests. I think that we just need to wander around until we discover how to actually do that. The only thing I DO know for a fact is that we need to find weapons as soon as possible. If all my other games are anything to go by, we are sitting ducks without them. Usually, you have to fight beasts or other enemies, and they drop stuff like weapons, coins, crystals, and even potions. I'm not sure if that applies since this isn't actually a game. Well, it might be, but we are physically here, so... I really don't know. Anyway, because of what I know about games, I'm hoping we can obtain weapons sooner rather than later."

Chad finally spoke up. "So, you're saying we really know nothing and that we have to assume it's like a game only in real life, correct?"

Drake nodded, his eyes still scanning the forest. "There's another problem."

"Oh?" Mike stated. His voice was sarcastic. "We don't seem to be short on problems. Which problem are you referring to?"

Drake wiped the hair out of his eyes. "Well, if this situation is according to the setup of the actual game, I am the main character. The two of you are player-created characters. After I set up my own character, I had to create a cohort. When I attempted to play, I couldn't control the cohort. When I moved, the two cohort characters followed. Even the box expressed to 'grow the power of your cohort.' I might have to be the one who levels you up. I'm not even sure if this place will let you do it yourself. We won't really know anything until we start quests, find loot, and fight beasts."



Chad gritted his teeth. He held his bow so tightly that his knuckles were turning white. "Shouldn't we be finding a way home? Pretty much all games can be paused. Can we leave and come back more prepared? Better yet, not come back at all?"

Drake sighed. "This seems too real. I think we have to complete quests to get home. There is even a chance that we have to finish the game to get back. I'm still not convinced this is a game. It's like one, but it might not actually be one. This whole situation is confusing. I don't know what to do, to be honest."

As they continued, Drake looked up ahead, his emerald green eyes narrowed as he found a pair of glowing yellow eyes visible in the trees. Something was watching them. Drake paused, seeing the glowing yellow orbs. "Chad, you're the only one with a weapon at the moment. I know you're a good shot. Do you see those eyes up ahead? I believe we found our first magical beast. If it charges at us, shoot to kill. Remember, we also need to retrieve any arrows you shoot. We don't want to run out."

Hearing Drake's words, Mike froze, then scanned the thick forest to find what Drake was seeing. He found them immediately. It was menacing yellow eyes that stared back at them.

The creature was moving forward slowly, getting closer. Its glowing yellow eyes were fixed on them.

"Chad, can Mike and I have one of your arrows. We need something we can use as a weapon."

Without taking his eyes off the beast, Chad pulled two arrows out of his quiver and handed them to Drake. Drake slowly passed one of them to Mike, who took it without hesitation. None of the youths took their eyes off the approaching beast.

The three boys froze in place, no longer moving forward, letting the beast come to them. It wasn't out of the trees yet. Drake quickly looked around them, making sure that the beast in front of them was the only one. If it were like a game, this could be an ambush. In an ambush in the game, while the player focuses on one attacker, the rest attack from other locations. Considering there was only one weapon, Drake was relieved when he didn't see any more.

The beast stalked toward them slowly. Its eyes were low to the ground, indicating its head was low, and a soft growl came from its maw. The menacing, glowing yellow eyes were focused, narrowed on Drake, completely ignoring the other two boys. There was yellow saliva that glowed brightly through the darkness as it dripped to the ground with each step. The beast continued to stalk forward.

The fact that the beast was focused only on him wasn't surprising to Drake since he would be considered the main character in the game. In all the games he had, any attacks were focused more on the main player of the game, and not the support. Since

his two friends were considered support according to the game he set up, he was the main target.

As it stalked out of the trees, the beast became visible. It looked like a small wolf with long fangs. The tail looked more like a rat's. Its thick fur was dark brown with specks of yellow running through it, giving it an iridescent glow. Bright yellow saliva was dripping out of the wolf beast's mouth, dripping from sharp fangs. Its paws had short claws that tore through the dirt as it picked up its pace, going for an attack.

Drake held the arrow tightly in his fist, his knuckles turning white. The point was facing up to defend himself.

Chad shot his first arrow and quickly notched a second. The first arrow soared through the air, hitting the beast in the neck. The beast's thick fur stopped it from going too deep. It slowed the beast down, but only a little.

Leaping up, the wolf dove toward Drake, who rolled to the side out of its path. Chad shot a second arrow, hitting it in the side. The beast leaped up, following Drake's path, shooting forward, this time landing on Drake, who was too slow to move out of the way. He shoved his arrow up into the wolf beast's throat as hard as he could, then yanked it sideways, slicing the throat open. Black blood pouring to the ground. Drake had one hand grasping the beast's closest front paw, trying to keep from being shredded. Everything about the beast felt real. Too real.

With Chad's arrows and Drake's aim for the wolf beast's throat, it fell to the ground, not getting back up. Bursting into particles of light, the wolf vanished, leaving nothing behind.

A soft voice whispered through Drake's mind.

**{You have killed a level one beast; you have received a skill.}**

**{Skill: Level one fireball received}**

**{Mana stat obtained}**

**{Mana +1}**

Drake stood in silence and waited for the voice to say more, but nothing came. He was expecting experience points or something similar, but it said nothing. It appeared to be the bare minimum.

Bending down, he picked up the arrows that fell to the ground after the beast disappeared. Handing the arrows back to Chad, keeping the one he was given for himself, he smiled.

"It seems that I have a system. It said that I killed a level one beast, and I received a skill. It's level one fireball...oh, and I received one mana point."

"Didn't Chad kill it? He shot all those arrows."

Drake stood there thinking. "There is only one way to find out. Even if the next beast goes for me, which I believe it will. One of you has to be the one to kill it. I will try to stay away from it. The system should say if you killed it. I think it's the only way to test how all this works. I actually think that I made the killing blow. I shoved the arrow in its throat and used it to slice it open. I could be wrong. We need to test it, though. I also need to test my new skill."

Nodding in agreement, they continued toward the forest, scanning for more danger.

#### **Chapter 4: 4: Game Plan**

"We need a game plan," Mike stated as they headed toward the trees. They were nearly out of the clearing, and they hadn't seen any more beasts.

Dry leaves crunched under their feet as they scanned the area for threats. They had no idea what they needed to do. Drake wanted to test out his new skill, but was unsure how to do it. The system didn't give any information or instructions. He couldn't even figure out how to bring his system up so he could check his stats.

Drake looked towards his two friends. "See if guys can activate a system. After that beast, I heard a voice giving me a skill and a mana point, but I couldn't figure out how to bring it up to look at stats or even attempt to use my skill."

Mike and Chad were silent as they walked. It looked like they were trying to inwardly focus on something. After a while, they looked at Drake and shook their head. Both looked disappointed. They were unable to activate anything.

They kept walking, scanning the area. They heard a sound coming from the side. Heavy footfalls hit the ground with loud thuds. The sound of leaves being crushed as the loud thuds grew closer. When they looked, Chad's face went pale, Mike was tense, and Drake inwardly begged his system to activate so he could use his new skill. He had no idea how to activate it.

Chad notched his bow, pulling the string tightly. Mike held his arrow like a knife. Drake tried to activate his fireball.

In front of them was another beast. This one was twice the size. It looked like a tree. Red eyes narrowed in on Drake. He was the main target. The sinister-looking tree moved forward; Sharp teeth that resembled a shark grinned back at him. A sap-like substance was dripping out of its wide mouth. Twisted vines wrapped around its limbs

with sickly flowers blooming around thick clusters of thorns. Drake knew what the beast was; he had similar beasts in some of his games. They called it a dryad.

Chad let his arrow loose. It bounced off the dryad's tough bark. Making the beast grin wider. Chad had shot at trees before; the arrows always pierced through. Wood was soft. Not this beast, which made the situation worse. If it can't be pierced, you can't kill it.

"Aim for the eyes!" Drake yelled. He was watching Chad's arrows bounce off the hard bark. There wasn't even a scratch to show it had been hit at all.

Chad notched another arrow, pulling the string tight, and he let the arrow fly. The arrow flew through the air, hitting the tree in the eye. It was a perfect shot. The dryad screamed in pain, then roared in rage.

Mike backed away, knowing he could do nothing. All he had was an arrow. If Chad couldn't piece it, neither could he.

In panic, without thinking, Drake lifted his hand and shouted, His eyes focused on the beast's wide chest, "Fireball!" he shouted. Immediately, a ball of fire formed in his hand and was sent flying at the dryad. Hitting the beast in the chest, the beast caught fire. Hot flames ignited, turning the beast into a pillar of fire. The beast roared. The fire didn't seem to stop it, though. It only pissed it off. Chad shot another arrow, aiming for the eyes, knowing it couldn't penetrate the tough bark of the beast.

The arrow found its mark, but turned to ash. The fire melted the arrow's shaft. "Don't waste your arrows!" Mike called.

Gritting his teeth, Chad yelled back. "I have no fucking choice!" Notching another, he let another fly, hitting the mark again. Chad spent long hours practicing his aim. He was a perfect shot. It was rare that he missed his mark.

The dryad screamed in pain. The arrows were adding up.

Drake tried to throw another fireball in the same manner he did before. Holding out his hand, he focused on the beast's chest. "Fireball!" he screamed again.

Fire formed in his hand, but much smaller. Throwing it anyway, it landed in the same spot as before. The dryad roared. Chad continued to pull his bow, arrows flying in quick succession. He was quickly running out of arrows.

Mike couldn't do anything. There was nothing for him to fight with. He felt useless as he watched his friends attempt to take down the large dryad.

Drake put his hand up again. "Fireball!" Fire formed in his hand, too small to do anything. It was the size of a marble. He through it anyway, not wanting to waste it. By the size of it, he knew he wouldn't be able to produce any more.

The dryad suddenly fell to one knee, then burst into a cloud of light particles before disappearing completely. Chad's arrowheads and a strange-looking bow were on the ground where the dryad once stood.

**{A member of your cohort has killed a Level 1 beast; your cohort grows stronger.}**

**{A magic bow has been rewarded}**

**{You have received +1 mana}**

Drake smiled, then walked to the magic bow, still on the ground where it had been dropped. He picked it up and handed it to Chad. "You killed it. It was a level 1 beast. This is yours. It's a magic bow," he informed his friend.

Chad's eyes sparkled as he looked at the bow. Grinning, he put his bow over his shoulder, then took the magic bow from Drake. It was a beautiful bow with runic carvings covering it. He pulled the string. An arrow formed made of wispy white energy. letting the arrow fly, he hit a nearby tree. There was a loud bang, and a hole was seen where the magic arrow hit. Chad smiled widely. "I can definitely use this."

Drake picked the arrowheads up off the ground from Chad's arrows and handed them to him. "You need to keep these. If you need to make arrows, you can reuse the tips."

Chad took them, placing them in his pack. Looking up at his friend, a question in his eyes. He sighed. "How did you know that I made the kill and not you with your fireballs?"

Drake smiled. "First, I have a question. Did you receive a system message?" Drake hoped that the answer was yes.

Chad shook his head. Mike was standing nearby, looking left out. Drake smiled. "I received one. It said that a member of my cohort killed a level 1 beast and that my cohort grows stronger. I received a mana point, and you received the bow. I think it paid you back for your lost arrows."

Drake looked over at Mike. "I have a skill. A weak one, but a cool one. Chad has a bow that won't run out of arrows. Now we need to try and make sure you make the next kill. Hopefully, it will give you a weapon. If I'm seeing this correctly, it will give you something that is suited for you." Drake's smile grew wider. "I think I figured out our game plan. Our first order of business should be to make sure you get a weapon, too."

Mike frowned. "Sounds great and all, but shouldn't our game plane be figuring out how to get back home?"

Drake smiled. "Remember, I told you what the box said. I think we get to take up everything we collect here." Drake pointed at Chad's new bow. "That bow, my fireball skill. Whatever we find, I think we get to keep. First, we don't know how to get home. Second, we might as well get stronger, collect cool shit while we're looking for the way home." He looked between his two friends. "What do you say we take advantage of this place while we're looking for the way out of here?"

Chad grinned, eyes gleaming as he looked at the magic bow. "I'm in."

Mike frowned. "I'd better get something really good. Even better than that," he said, pointing at Chad's bow.

Chad walked over to Mike and handed him his bow and quiver. "Take care of my girl." Chad was attached to his bow. He had won a lot of competitions with it. It was more like an extension of him. To let Mike use it said a lot. The situation was dire, and Mike didn't have anything to protect himself with.

Mike didn't hesitate; With a look of relief on his face, he took the quiver first and put the arrow he was holding inside, then took the bow from Chad's hand. "Thanks, man, I know how much she means to you. I'll take good care of her for you."

Drake still had an arrow, not willing to give it up. He didn't like only having a fireball. He could tell that he could only throw a few. Since he gained another mana point, he was praying he could throw more if he needed to. Next time he needed to use the skill, he wanted to make it count. This time, he knew that he had thrown his limit. He only threw three, and only one of them was strong enough to do damage.

With everyone in agreement, the three boys headed through the thick trees.

## **Chapter 5: 5: Hidden Quest**

The three boys had been walking for a while, thankful that they hadn't seen any more beasts. They had already fought two that day. Although they received awesome rewards after defeating the level one beasts, since they hadn't been in the dimension for very long, they wanted to get established.

One of the most important things that they had to figure out was how to feed themselves and where they could sleep safely for the night. The only one who brought a packed lunch to school every day was Mike. That wasn't enough to feed all three of them.

Up ahead, the thick trees were beginning to thin.

Mike pointed up ahead. "Is that a road?"

Drake and Chad looked in the direction Mike was pointing. Up ahead, a dirt road could be seen. It wound through the thinner parts of the trees in the direction of a large mountain. As they reached the road, they found that the huge mountain was shaped like the head of a massive dragon.

Mike gulped. "I really hope that is a mountain and not a dragon. Dragons are magical beasts, right? What if that's a dragon?"

Drake studied the mountain for a second. Each curve and every crevice. It was pale red with light cream in areas. Dark shadows covered the base, where the tips of trees could be seen. "No, I think that's just a mountain. It looks like solid rock." Drake stared a little longer at the large mountain, studying it. "I think we should head to it. Besides, why would a road lead to a dragon?"

Chad was staring at the large dragon head mountain, also. Hearing Drake's comment, he frowned. "It could be going away from it instead," he offered. Looking down the road, going the opposite direction, and away from the dragon mountain, he tried to see any signs of where that direction would lead. All that was visible was the road going through the trees.

Mike was doing the same, looking in both directions, back and forth. "Which way are we going to go? We have a massive mountain that looks like a dragon in that direction," he said, pointing to it. "Or... at least the head of one. The rest could be behind it. OR we can head that way. Away from it," he said, pointing in the opposite direction. "You're leading us, Drake. Which way do you want to go?"

Drake stared at his friend for a moment. "Why do you say that I'm leading? We're kind of all stuck here together. We can all decide."

Chad shook his head. "No... No... This is like your game, right? Well. You said that when you set it up, you were the one who was the player, and we were your cohort. Even the beasts target you instead of us. I'm pretty sure that in this real-life game situation, we have to go by the game's setup. I think we are meant to follow you." He looked over at Mike for confirmation before looking over at Drake. "I also think that there is a possibility that if we don't do that, the game will never let us leave this place. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that this is your game to play, and we are meant to be your backup."

This was the most Chad had spoken in a long time. He wasn't a big talker. That alone made the other two pause. They knew he was on to something. Since they didn't want to take any chances. They took Chad's advice.

Chad finally spoke up. "Besides, if you want proof. You're the only one of us who has a system. That alone is proof enough for me to believe that the only way to get home is through you."

Mike nodded vigorously. "I think he's right."



Sighing, Drake looked in both directions, trying to decide. Turning to the large dragon head mountain, he smiled widely. "In all my games, you find the coolest shit. Let's head that way," he said, pointing at the looming dragon head. He didn't want to add that it was also the most dangerous if he was comparing it to his games.

As they started walking toward the dragon's head, a soft voice spoke into Drake's head.

**{Hidden quest found: Find the cave of Valor/ obtain the Master Staff}**

Drake waited for more information, but nothing came. "Damn it! Bare minimum." He whispered aloud.

"Huh?" Mike asked, confused. Chad was looking at Drake expectantly.

Sighing, Drake explained. "My system said that a hidden quest was found. I...or we...have to find something called the 'cave of valor' and obtain something called 'the master staff.' It didn't give any further information. Nothing at all to go by. It gave me the bare minimum. That's what I was complaining about. I can only assume that because of the direction we chose, the cave is in the dragon head mountain, and the staff is in the cave."

Chad smiled widely. "Doesn't that mean we are closer to getting home since we finally got a hidden quest? Not only that, we now know how to get hidden quests. We make a choice. If the choice leads to a quest, it gives us one. The direction you chose gave us a quest."

Hearing the word 'home,' this made Mike smile. He had been on edge since they had gone through the portal. He may be the strongest of his friends, but that didn't mean he wasn't scared. Chad has his archery skill, and Drake has his gaming experience. Drake might be weak, but he was incredibly smart, a complete genius. All he had was his athletic build and football. It was the sport he was best at.

Drake shrugged. "I don't know about us being closer to getting home, but I hope so." Drake looked over at Chad. Ever since he received his magic bow, his mood had changed. Normally, he was serious, always keeping a straight face. He hardly ever smiled. Now he seemed to have a permanent grin. The other thing he noticed was that he spoke a lot more. It was almost like he was finding his element.

Wind blew through the trees. Whistling sounds could be heard. It sounded like a bird. Something about it was off. Mike was the first to react. He quickly notched the bow awkwardly. He had never shot one before. He knew he would eventually have to.

Chad, seeing Mike's actions, pulled the magic bow off his back and prepared to fire.

Drake stopped and looked around them. "Those whistles don't sound like birds. They sound like someone is signaling," he whispered. His voice was even.

Clicking sounds followed, then another whistle. The sound of it echoed through the trees.

In a hushed voice, Chad looked over at Drake. "What do we do?"

Drake looked between his friends. He would see they already had their bows ready. Nodding in approval at seeing this, he whispered back. "I think we're about to be ambushed. Prepare to fight. And, don't die. I'm pretty sure we die for real if we do. I don't want to take any chances, so stay alive."

Just as Drake said this, five men stepped out from behind the trees. Drake could tell by the men's appearance that they were bandits.

The leader, a tall man with a tangled beard and burly muscles, stepped forward. In one hand, he held a sword, the other a dagger. The man grinned; his blackened, decaying teeth gave him an even more menacing appearance.

The four behind him stood flanking him on each side in pairs. All carrying swords.

Their brown leather boots were heavily worn, damaged in areas. Stained tunics hung loosely nearly to their knees. A strap across their chest holding the scabbards of their swords. Each had a thick belt, a small leather pouch attached. One of them carried a large sack. It was probably meant to hold the loot they received from those they robbed on the road. It bulged slightly, showing that it wasn't empty.

All the men were dirty, covered in mud and dirt. Some had what appeared to be dry blood on the stained clothes. Their oily hair was ragged and unkempt.

Their sinister smiles grew as they noticed the trio of boys' lack of weapons. One had a bow with no arrows, another with only a small handful. The one in the center only had an arrow. All they saw were easy targets.

"What do we have here?" the leader sneered, eyeing the three boys. The man's eyes lingered briefly on the bow in Chad's hand. It was clear he knew it was no ordinary bow.

As if on cue, the other four began to spread out, surrounding Drake and his companions.

**{New quest detected: Defeat the bandits}**

As usual, there was no further information.

Drake had one hand grasping his arrow tightly. He grinned slightly, knowing he would get rewards. He hoped Mike would get a weapon this time. "Let's do this."