

## Dimension Master

### #Chapter 11: Delayed - Read Dimension Master Chapter 11: Delayed

#### **Chapter 11: 11: Delayed**

Drake led his friends to meet Ivan, who was standing on a porch talking with an old woman with thick grey hair. The man's face was pinched in worry. The old woman was speaking animatedly, waving her hands about in panic. Her eyes were red from crying. There were streaks of dried tears still on her wrinkled cheeks.

The boy who they had seen come to get Ivan was sitting on a bench by the door, kicking his legs back and forth. Tears were streaming down his pale face. His gaze was fixed on the floor, his tears forming a small puddle beneath him. Drake walked up to the boy, bending down to meet the child's eyes. "Is everything alright?" he asked quietly. He tried to make his voice soothing.

The boy shook his head, his tears continuing to fall. He wiped wet tears from his face with one hand and sniffled. "Nelly is missing," he sobbed. "The monsters got her."

Remembering that the monsters eat flesh, Drake's face paled. "Who is Nelly?" Drake asked quietly.

This made the boy sob harder. His chest began to heave, snot pouring out of his nose. His shoulders shook as he cried.

"Nelly is his little cousin. She's only five years old," Ivan explained, interrupting after seeing Drake speaking to the young boy. "The boy's name is Tod. Nelly ran outside last night to get her doll. It was too late before anyone realized she had run outside to stop her. As soon as she picked her doll up, she was taken by the monsters. It had dropped from the sky and grabbed her. It flew off with her."

A soft voice floated through Drake's head.

**{New quest detected: Save Nelly from the Gargoyles}**

Drake waited a moment to see if more information would be given, but there wasn't any. At least now he knew what the monsters were. Even in the lore, gargoyles turned to stone during the day. It was the fact that they needed to be invited that puzzled him.

Drake stepped forward to address the mayor. "Mayor Ivan, do you know where the monsters stay during the day?" he asked. "I believe the little girl is still alive. If we can get to her before it gets dark, we can save her," Drake offered. He knew that he

wouldn't have received a quest if the child were already dead. The problem was finding out where the gargoyles took her, and he could get there and back before it got dark. "You said they turn to stone in the day, right? We can use that time to rescue her."

Hearing Drake's words, the little boy, Tod, perked up. His sobs stopped. A new hope was filling his eyes. He stood up from the bench and ran to Drake, wrapping his small arms around him. "Please save my baby cousin," he pleaded. "Please save her."

Ivan turned to the boy, then to Drake. Ivan knew that Dimension Masters had an instinct that was nearly always right. He hoped that even the heir had such an instinct. If Drake felt the child was still alive, the chances of him being right were rather high. "Master Drake, follow me." He spoke. "There are men in the tavern. We can ask them for help. Once we leave for the monster's lair, we can be there in a couple of hours."

Not waiting for a response, Ivan rushed through the street with Drake and his friends trailing behind him. He led the boys to a small building. A sign on the door declared it was a tavern. Ivan burst through the doors. He scanned the room filled with villagers, having spiked tea and coffee. Some were already drinking strong ale. "Everyone, I need a team to accompany these boys. They need a guide to take them to the monster's lair. They took Nelly, and these boys are going to get her back!"

The room became silent. Everyone stopped their conversation immediately.

Drake eyed the room. A frown formed on his face. He could feel the tension rising in the room.

There was a long pause before anyone spoke.

A gruff man sitting at the counter turned, his tone uncaring. "If the monsters got her, she's already dead." He turned back to his stein and took a swig, setting it back on the bar.

The other patrons nodded in agreement. Many of their faces were troubled, but none spoke. None of them wanted to risk their life for a lost cause.

"The monsters are stone right now. The only danger is the beasts and bandits on the road," the mayor pointed out, trying to convince at least some of them to help.

"Forget about her," the man at the counter grumbled, not even turning his head as he took another swig of his drink. "She's dead. Why bother going out there if there isn't any reason to? It's pointless."

Drake stepped forward, straightening his robes. He scanned the crowd with disdain, but directed his words to the man at the counter. "All we need is a map or solid directions; you don't have to come. We don't need cowards coming with us."

Drake's friends looked at him in astonishment. He was being much bolder than he normally would have been. At home, he was the weakest of the three and a little shy. All he did was play his games. His only two friends were standing beside him. Now he was demanding, assertive, and incredibly bold. Something about the situation brought out confidence that they weren't used to seeing with him.

The man at the counter stiffened at Drake's words. He stood up slowly as if holding himself back. When he turned around to meet Drake's gaze, his eyes were blazing. "We are not cowards. She's dead. We can't rescue a corpse." He argued. Anger tinged his words. His face was turning red as if it would explode at any moment.

Drake smiled, but it did not reach his emerald eyes. "Tell us where to go," he demanded. "I'll tell you what. If we bring her back safely, then you will owe me a favor of my own design. Believe me, I can be quite creative in asking for things. If I'm wrong, and she's already dead. Then I will owe you. I'm sure that's something you can agree with, right?"

"Agreed," the man shot back and smirked. His tone was smug. The man looked Drake up and down, his eyes suddenly widened as he finally recognized Drake's green robes. He hadn't realized who he was talking to. Gulping down his saliva, he explained how to get to the monster's lair.

The man's hand shook slightly as he drew a map on a sheet of parchment and explained how to get there, periodically pointing to places on the map. Drake and his friends paid attention. They needed to hurry to save the little girl. Forgetting where they would be going would be bad.

Once the map was complete, Drake took it off the counter, putting it in his robes. A wide grin spread over his face. "Time to go hunting," he said, then winked at the man. "I'll be back with Nelly. I am quite confident in that."

The man flinched, turning pale. He was standing in front of the Dimension Master and hadn't realized it until it was too late. They always seem to know things. If he believed that the child was still alive, the chance of rescuing her was high. What worried the man was what the Dimension Master would ask for. The man had no idea that the boy was the dimension master's heir, and not yet the actual dimension master.

Drake leaned toward the man, his emerald green eyes like steel. "If this turns out to be a false map, I will kill you myself."

"It's...it's accurate," the man stated, stepping back a couple of steps. Fear radiated from him.

Drake, still smiling, left the tavern, his friends following behind. The monsters' lair was in the same direction as the mountain, only a little to the left of it. He knew they had to hurry. They needed to get the little girl and return to Draco Town with her before dark.

As they exited the small town, Drake lost his smile. He appeared to be in deep thought.

As Drake led them out of the town, Chad pulled out his bow, while Mike kept his grip on the top of his sword. They were preparing to fight beasts. They both knew they would encounter them sooner or later. It was just a matter of time.

They were following the direction that the man in the tavern had given them. Drake knew it was accurate. If it wasn't, the man would have said something after he was threatened.

There was silence for a few minutes before Mike spoke. "Why do you think that kid is still alive?" Mike asked Drake, wondering why he was so confident in rescuing a girl that everyone seemed to think was already dead.

Drake turned to his friends. "I received a quest to save her," he said simply. "And these monsters; they're gargoyles."

## **Chapter 12: 12: Save Nelly**

"Wait! What?" Mike blurted. Drake had just told them that he had received a quest to save the little girl, Nelly, and that the monsters that took her were actually gargoyles. "Gargoyles! Really?!"

Drake nodded. "I received the quest when Ivan told us what had happened. I didn't want to say anything. I'm pretty sure that none of those people have a system, so I figured that I needed to keep my mouth shut until we got out of town."

Chad came up beside them, a large grin on his face. "That means we get loot." He patted his bow, then held up his dimensional storage ring. "I'm really liking the loot."

Drake pulled out the map from his robes, then looked at his friends. "If nothing stops us, we should be there in a couple of hours. I want to get in there, get Nelly, and get the hell out of there. If it takes us too long, we're going to end up fighting a bunch of those things, and I'm sorry to say, but I doubt we're strong enough to survive something like that. Level one beasts and bandits are one thing, but gargoyles are an entirely different monster altogether. No pun intended."

"Too bad your car didn't stay here; we could have just driven it there," Mike blurted. "Hell, we'd already be at the base of the mountain and on our way to completing the quest if we had your car."

Drake shook his head. "First of all. There is no gas in this place; at least I don't think there is. Second, this road is too rough; my tires would be destroyed by the time we got there, and lastly, there aren't any modern technologies in this dimension. We may be able to pass wearing our regular clothes, but there is no way we can explain a car."

After walking for about twenty minutes, Drake checked the map, making sure they were still following it. Once he verified that they were, he replaced the map in his robes. A sudden thought popped into his head, making him pause, causing his two friends to nearly bump into him.

"Everything okay, Drake?" Mike asked. Chad was watching him closely, but didn't say anything.

Ignoring them, Drake pulled the book out of his cuff and opened it to one of the pages. Sweeping his hand, a set of beautiful armor came out. It had Arrows and vines decorating the breastplate. Drake handed it to Chad, then, sweeping his hand again, pulled out a second set.

Chad looked at the armor before putting it on. He studied the design for a moment. "The design fits me perfectly. This armor is awesome," he said, then noticing that Drake handed a set to Mike as well, who was putting his on. Mike's had lightning, swirling patterns, and claw marks." Chad suddenly frowned. "Where is your armor, Drake? Don't you have a set also?"

Drake tapped his chest. "I'm already wearing mine. It's under my robes. I put it on before coming down to breakfast."

Just as the boys had their armor situated, a growl came from the trees near the road. Turning to the direction of the sound, it was another wolf beast with the tail of a rat.

"You're up, Mike!" Drake said, preparing himself to defend his friend. "This one looks the same as the others. That means it's a level one beast. See if you can figure out what your sword does. Chad and I will back you up."

The beast roared, its focus on Drake. They knew that was going to be the issue. Mike jumped in front of Drake, holding his sword in one hand and pointing the tip of it at the beast. The blade shone brightly with a white light. It was the same color as Chad's arrows.

Without thinking, when he pointed the sword at the beast with the thought of stabbing it, the white light left the blade and crashed point-first into the wolf. The wolf yelped in pain, then growled.

Mike grinned. He held the sword up, ready to swing. The wolf leaped up. Mike sliced forward, the sharp point grazing the wolf's thick hide. A trickle of blood fell to the dirt.

The wolf landed inches from Mike. Its short claws, razor sharp, sliced toward Mike. It grazed the armor, sliding off easily. The leather was sturdier than they had thought.

Punching the tip of the sword toward the wolf, the blade lit up, crackling electricity wrapped around the blade as he punched it forward. The electric energy shot toward

the wolf, hitting it at point-blank range. The wolf flew backwards, its back hitting a tree, making a cracking sound.

Mike prepared his sword again. Holding it upright, he prepared to slash. The blade began to shine with a white light. There was no electricity this time. He waited for the wolf to attack, his blade held high. There was a large smirk on his face. "Come, you bastard, attack. I dare you!"

The wolf charged, this time aiming for Mike. Mike slashed the sword. The energy from the blade sharpened as he sliced down in a wide arch. The energy sliced through the wolf, then the blade followed. Two halves of the wolf fell to the ground in different directions, then vanished into particles of light.

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

**{Gold has been received}**

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

Mike picked up the little bag of gold that dropped from the beast. Looking inside, he smiled. "I think I know how we get gold coins," he said, handing the bag to Drake.

Drake peeked inside the bag. It was the same type of gold coins that he had in his pouch, making him smile. He handed it back to Mike. "First, the wolf beast you killed was a level one beast. I guessed correctly. Second, you killed it; the gold is yours."

Mike took the pouch and attached it to his belt. His smile grew. Looking at his two friends, Mike stroked his storm sword. "Yeah, I'm liking the loot too."

The boys followed the map, only stopping to relieve themselves. They didn't even stop to eat. They wanted to get to the gargoyle's lair as soon as possible. The road wound through the trees. Around a bend of trees was a clearing. They had to move off the road and cross the clearing to the other side.

They kept scanning the area for beasts but found none.

"It's been nearly two hours. We only saw one beast. Something about that makes me nervous," Mike stated.

Chad nodded in agreement, not saying anything. He held his bow tightly, ready to use it at any moment.

Drake took the map out, scanning it and comparing it to the surrounding area. Everything matched. The gargoyles' lair was just ahead. They were almost there.

When they reached the other side of the clearing, there was a rock covered in blood. Drake bent down, assessing the blood. It looked to have been there for several hours. Because it was fairly fresh, it appeared to have been there for only a few hours. It was dry, but not completely. Because of how early it was, Drake guessed it was from last night's hunt. "I sure hope that's not little Nellie's blood," he whispered solemnly.

Drake turned to his friends. "I wonder if more than one of the villagers was taken last night."

Drake's friends shrugged, their eyes focused in the direction they were meant to go.

Listening intently, Drake tried to hear sounds that didn't seem to belong. There was nothing. Only the sounds of rustling leaves and wind whistling through the trees.

Stepping forward, Drake looked at his friends. His expression was grim. "Let's get this over with. Whatever you do, don't die."

Stepping into the trees, they scanned the area, praying they didn't run into anything. Their prayers paid off. Nothing leaped at them through the trees. They moved slowly, silently toward the gargoyles' lair.

In the distance, they could see homes tucked in the trees. It was silent as if everyone was gone.

Moving closer, Drake focused on the homes. Through one of the windows, he saw movement. He pointed at the window. "There. I see movement."

The boys nodded as they headed toward the window.

Stopping at the base of the tree that held the structure, Drake directed Mike and Chad to stay on the ground and cover him if need be. After they both agreed, he started to climb up the tree. They hadn't found a ladder or other easier access to the structures above. He knew the creatures could fly. They didn't need anything but their wings.

Reaching the top, he pulled himself onto the platform that served as a walkway. Drake made his way to the window. He briefly looked down at his friends, who were keeping an eye on their surroundings. Chad, with his bow ready to shoot, and Mike held his sword, ready to cut whatever attacked them down. Reaching the window, Drake peered through. His eyes widened as he took in what he saw. He gasped in shock.

### **Chapter 13: 13: Gargoyles Lair**

The vast village in the trees was eerily silent as Drake peered through the window into one of the primitive structures. His friends were below, their backs protected by the large trees, as they scanned the area for danger.



Inside, the structure was revealed to be a holding area for what the gargoyles would be considered cattle. There were cages lined up against the jagged walls. Blood stains washed the walls as if the walls were painted in blood red paint. All the cages were small, each barely able to fit one human. There were eight cages in total. The bars were stained with dried blood that looked like rust. The smell of rot and decay permeated the air. The structure's metallic stench brought swarms of insects that resembled flies but were the size of wasps.

There were only two cages that contained life. One was the little girl Nelly, whom they had come to save. Her small body was pressed to the back of the cage, the doll held tight against her small chest. The other was a man in ragged, bloodstained clothes. The man was unable to stand due to the small size of his cage. His hands were bound with a thick rope. Blood dripped from around the binding, dripping onto the floor.

He looked weak. His pale skin looked to be turning blue. He was alive, though. His chest was rising and falling slowly. A soft snore could be heard.

At one side of the structure, there was a makeshift butcher block. Large knives were lined up on the side, some hanging from the ceiling, held up with twisted twine. The structure resembled a demented human meat processing plant. A scene from a horror movie.

Slowly following the wall of the structure. Finding the door, Drake crept inside. Avoiding the puddles of blood and piles of chopped up flesh, he went to Nelly first. She was the priority. He would save them both if he could. Finding an iron key, he opened the lock. The door of the cage creaked as he opened it, the sound waking the child. Backing away, pressing her small back tighter against the cold bars, the child screamed. Drake swiftly held his hand over her mouth, muffling the sound to keep her from bringing attention to them.

"Shhh..." he whispered. "I'm here to take you home. No noise, okay. We don't want to get caught, do we?" he asked quietly.

The little girl looked up and nodded. Tears ran down her angelic face. In one hand, she held her doll. Unlike the man in the other cage, she was not tied up.

Taking her tiny hand, he gently pulled her up from the floor and led her out of the cage and out of the structure. Outside the door of the structure, he stopped. "Wait here. I have to get that guy out, too. Okay?"

The little girl nodded, hugging her doll. Her thumb was jammed in her mouth as she sucked on it rapidly. The child shook in fear. Her eyes were still wet with tears, but she remained silent. Afraid to make a sound.



Drake rushed back into the structure, avoiding the carnage on the floor. He looked down at the sleeping man before using the iron key; he opened the lock of the second cage. Hearing the creak of the door swinging open, the man opened his eyes.

"Make no sound," Drake warned. "We need to get you and the girl out of here before they find us. We're pressed for time."

Drake pulled one of the knives off the butcher block and cut the ropes off the man's wrists. The man crawled out of the cage and stood up. He first stretched out his cramped bone before he looked at Drake. Without warning, the man grinned, pulling a knife from the ceiling and swinging it at Drake.

Drake stepped back and frowned, "Really, I save your life and you try to kill me?" he asked angrily, then held his hand up, "Fireball," he called. A ball of fire formed in his hand and shot for the man, hitting him in the face. Just as the man began to scream, Drake took one of the large knives and slammed it into the man's neck, severing his head. The head fell to the floor with a thud. Blood poured out of the stump onto the floor, then suddenly vanished, turning into light particles. A coiled wire with a handle lay on the floor in its place.

A soft voice floated through his mind.

**{You have slain a level one bandit}**

**{You have gained a reward}**

**{You have gained a magic whip}**

'Hmmm... No mana this time.'

Drake exited the structure, not even looking back. The whip was made from a thin, shiny metal. One end was razor sharp; a casing affixed to the sharp blade at its thin tip. It was a small sheath meant to protect the blade. The closer to the handle, the wider the whip became. He wrapped it around his wrist for easy access. Heading to his friend's position, he bent down for Nelly to get on his back. "Get on my back. I have to climb down. Okay?"

Nelly wrapped her tiny arms around his neck. Drake pulled her up and moved her little legs around his waist, then began to climb down. With Nelly holding tightly like a spider monkey, he descended the large tree. Drake looked around him at the other structures.

Nestled in the trees were dozens of makeshift structures made of wood. They were primitive, with stretched beast skins that served as a roof. Clearly, the gargoyles had some intelligence if they were able to produce such structures.

Drake stared at the treehouses, studying every detail. The platform's large supporting beams were laid out between thick branches. Rows of wood were lined up on the beams, creating a rough platform. On the platforms, the structures were assembled. Remembering Ivan's words, Something about the situation didn't make sense. If they wouldn't even touch the buildings of the villagers, why do they have similar structures of their own? It didn't make sense.

When he reached the ground, he gently pulled Nelly off his back. Her small feet softly touched the grass beneath her as Drake set her on the hard ground. "Stay with these two. They're my friends. I'll be right back. I have to take care of something."

Chad being the closest, Nelly grabbed Chad's leg and held on. Her small arms wrapped around his leg for dear life. As Drake walked over to a nearby woodpile, he picked up a large axe. He stared at the axe for a moment. The handle was a thick wood with a stone blade. "It doesn't make sense." He whispered. Mike was close enough to hear.

Mike studied Drake for a minute. "What are you doing?" Mike finally questioned, looking at the axe in Drake's hand.

"Something doesn't add up. They say the monsters won't even touch the buildings in the village, regardless of whether they are made out of wood or stone. All these structures are made of wood. They even live in the trees. This axe has a wooden handle. The blade is stone. It doesn't make sense. I'm going to look around."

"Maybe we should just take Nelly back and come back in the morning. It will be difficult for us to protect her if we're fighting monsters." Chad added. It was a reminder that they had to think of the little girl. She was the priority. They could always come back after they get her home safely.

"This place is on our way to Dragon Head Mountain. We can stop back here on the way," Mike added. He turned to the scared little girl wrapped around Chad's leg. "We need to get her home."

Drake slammed the axe into the stump next to the woodpile. "Shit, you're right. It will put Nelly in danger the longer we stay here. We'll be back. And when we are, we will end them all." Going back to Nelly, Drake urged her to climb on his back once again.

The boys with their precious cargo exited the lair and out of the forest. They were back in the clearing. Just like before, there was no sign of life. Passing through the clearing was uneventful. Drake stopped just before they exited it, looking around. "Even this clearing doesn't make sense," he observed aloud. "Even beasts won't come near here. There has to be something going on that we don't see." Then, looking at his friends, "First, we get Nelly home. We have a quest to complete. I haven't received a message that it's completed yet. Either we have to get her home to complete it, or there is danger that is lurking, waiting to strike. Be ready to fight at any moment."

The boys stepped back onto the packed dirt road and headed back toward the small town. They kept looking around them, waiting for something to strike. All three of them felt like they were being watched. All three of them were right.

## **Chapter 14: 14: Watcher**

A man with emerald green eyes stared at the game green in Drake's room. He was watching the three boys on the screen rescue a little girl. The child was wrapped around Drake's back, sucking on her thumb. Her doll was grasped in her hand.

The man smiled. He was pleased that Drake chose not to leave his friends and scout the gargoyles' lair. His priority was the child. A Dimension Master must know his priorities, and Drake chose correctly.

The Dimension Master waved a hand at the screen. A soft green glow formed, then smoothly moved into the screen. He was clearing the road of beasts for the young heir. Although Drake would have gained loot fighting beasts, he wanted to reward Drake for his choices.

The three boys kept a close watch on their surroundings far more than they had been doing. The man knew that it was due to the child on Drake's back. This made the Dimension Master smile.

He had been watching the three boys ever since they had crashed into the portal. He was even the one who had removed the car from the dimension. The modern vehicle wasn't supposed to be there.

The man smiled before shutting off the screen. "Complete the hidden quest, young one, we have much to discuss."

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Drake walked with his two friends down the dirt road toward Draco Town. The little girl was fast asleep. Her doll held loosely, threatening to fall from her grasp. Drake suddenly stopped, then turned to his friends, his features puzzled. "I don't feel like we're being watched anymore. Do you?"

The boys looked around. They still could see no threats. There was no evidence of beast lingering. No bandits either. There was nothing. The tingle in the back of their neck from being watched had vanished.

A soft breeze fluttered leaves across the packed dirt road.

"I don't feel it either," Chad admitted. "It was like flipping a switch. At one moment it was there and the next it was gone."

Turning their attention to the road, they continued. They still had another hour to go before they would reach the town.

"I think we need to stay another night in the town. We can try to leave early in the morning," Drake noted. "I want to check out that gargoyle lair, but I also know I need to finish the hidden quest. It might get us back home. Part of me wants to take care of the gargoyle lair first. If they do turn into stone, then I can destroy the statues. It won't allow them to turn back. It would eliminate a danger to the residents of Draco. I don't particularly care about the bandits, but I like the villagers."

Mike looked over at Drake, his features perplexed. "Bandits? Why bring them up?"

Turning to Mike, Drake gave him a sideways smirk. "Nelly wasn't the only prisoner they had. There was a man. It was a level one bandit. After I freed him, he attempted to kill me. I killed him first." Drake shook his head. "Who does that? Who kills their savior? Really? I save his sorry ass, and he tries to end mine! Anyway, the structure they were in looked like a horror movie. It was where they cut up the humans they captured. It was a slaughterhouse for their prisoners."

Chad shook his head in disbelief. "Yeah, I think those gargoyles need to be wiped out. It would at least make Draco Town a little safer."

Mike frowned; he was debating on saying something. Finally, he sucked in a breath before speaking. "I know this isn't the same, but we have to think about it, though. We eat cows. Would that give the cows the right to slaughter all of us? To us, some animals are our food. To some animals, we are food. I'm thinking it might be hypocritical to wipe out an entire race for something we do ourselves."

Drake turned and looked at his friend. "Then what do you think we should do?"

Mike shrugged. "I didn't think that far."

As they walked, Drake thought about it. It was a tough decision. He could make everyone's life easier and eradicate the threat, or he could find a way to protect the innocent.

"I think I know what I need to do. Everything we saw in the gargoyles' lair didn't add up. What Ivan said and what we saw contradicted each other. We need to find the truth. After we find the truth, we need to find the best way to keep Draco town safe."

Mike and Chad nodded in agreement.

Twenty minutes from Draco town, a rustling of leaves on both sides of the road caused Drake and his friends to turn. A small band of bandits stood on either side of the boys. There were four men, all dressed in rags.

One of them eyed the girl on Drake's back. "It appears we hit the Jackpot," one of them said.

The man's voice woke Nelly up; her grip tightened on Drake. "Close your eyes, Nelly," Drake whispered. "Hold on real tight, okay?"

Drake's attention went to the bandits surrounding them.

Chad pulled his bow string, forming a white energy arrow, and aimed it at one of the bandits.

Mike pulled his sword, its blade shining brightly as he glared at his enemy.

With one hand, Drake pulled the small sheath off his metallic whip and let the coils fall to the dirt. With the other, he held his hand up, a sinister grin on his face. "Fireball!" A ball of fire formed on his hand and shot toward the man's face. Hitting the man, he screamed as the fire spread to his oily hair. With the other hand, Drake lashed his whip, his intention to slice through the second man's neck.

The whip flew out, glowing a soft green. The small, razor-sharp point grew longer, its edges sharpening even further. It gracefully flew through the air as it lashed out. The green energy lashed first, slicing cleanly, and the metal whip followed. The man's head separated from the body. As it fell, it burst into light particles and vanished.

A soft voice floated through his head.

**{You have slain a level one bandit}**

**{You have received a reward}**

**{You have received gold}**

Turning to a second bandit, who was screaming in pain, his head in flames. Drake shot out his whip, not even using his skills. It lashed out the same as before. It flowed gracefully as it flew through the air, then sliced cleanly through the man.

**{You have slain a level one bandit}**

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

**{A member of your cohort has slain a level one bandit; your cohort grows stronger}**

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

**{A member of your cohort has slain a level one bandit; Your cohort grows stronger}**

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

Drake walked over and picked up the small bag of gold, then tied it on his belt. On his back, Nelly was still crying, her grip tight and her eyes still shut.

"You can open your eyes now. It's safe," Drake told her gently.

The little girl opened her eyes and looked around. "No bad men?" she asked. Her sweet voice was questioning.

Drake smiled at the little girl. "The bad men are gone," he assured her.

The little girl whipped her face with her free hand before stuffing her thumb in her mouth. The other still held tightly to her doll.

Chad looked around on the ground surrounding where the man had vanished in particles of light. He frowned. "No loot."

Mike was doing the same, just as disappointed.

Drake smiled. "I killed two. I did get a bag of gold for one of them." Scratching his chin, he looked between his two friends. "Is it just me, or are these guys getting easier to kill?"

Both boys nodded. Chad still had his bow held tightly in his hand, ready to use it if he needed to. Mike had one hand resting on the hilt of his sword. Neither of the boys spoke. They looked like they were in deep thought, as if thinking about something important.

Drake continued. "Every time you two kill a beast or a bandit, I get a message that says what you killed and ends with 'your cohort grows stronger.' I think you two are gaining some kind of stat points, too. So far, my system only says mana for me. Although it doesn't give me a balance, it just says that I received a mana point. It doesn't tell me I'm getting any other stat, even though I feel physically stronger. My system seems to be the bare minimum."

Drake replaced the small sheath onto the tip of his bladed whip, then coiled it around his wrist. He decided that he really liked his new whip.

Looking down the road, they could see in the distance through the trees, the small town of Draco. With one last look at their surroundings, they continue their journey.

**Chapter 15: 15: Back to Draco Town**

Drake and his friends entered the small town of Draco. Nelly perked up, seeing that she was back home. A wide smile etched her angelic face.

As soon as they stepped inside the town, a soft voice floated through Drake's mind.

**{Quest 'Save Nelly from the Gargoyles' complete}**

**{You have received a new Skill}**

**{You have received: Whirlwind Level 1}**

'No mana...I wonder why.'

The three boys made their way to the tavern. Drake figured that the men from that morning would still be there. Going up the steps, he set Nelly on her feet and took her hand, leading her inside through the wide double doors. Mike and Chad followed behind them.

As they opened the double doors, all eyes turned to the newcomers. Gasps were heard throughout the room. Everyone knew about Nelly getting taken. They also knew of the pointless rescue mission. As the patrons of the tavern looked at the three boys, one of them was holding the hand of the child they had gone to save. Mayor Ivan had been sitting in a back corner, writing in a thick parchment book. His quill was dripping dark ink on the page as he looked up. Seeing that it was Drake and his companions, he stood up abruptly, knocking his inkwell over as his round belly bumped the table. The ink spread a dark puddle across the rough wood. Ivan's eyes moved to the child who was grasping the young Dimension Master's hand.

Not caring about his spilled ink, Ivan rushed over to the trio. "You did it! You really did it! You saved her!"

Not responding to the mayor's excitement, Drake scanned the room looking for the man who made a deal with him. He wanted to rub it in. He knew he was being petty, but the man pissed him off. The man was nowhere to be seen. He could seek him out later. He then turned his attention to Ivan.

Turning to the mayor, Drake said calmly. "Nelly has been through a lot. She needs food. There are also some things that I need to discuss with you. Things that we noticed while we were at the monsters' lair." He didn't say gargoyles. He knew the villagers didn't know what the monsters were. Since Drake didn't want more questions, he continued to call the monsters aloud.

Ivan nodded. "Let's take Nelly home. We can go to the inn and have a bite to eat while we discuss it."



The boys followed Ivan out of the tavern, Drake picking the little girl up as they exited. Following the mayor, they headed to Nana's house.

When they arrived at the residence, Nana was sitting on the steps, her eyes still red from crying. It was clear she had been crying most of the time they were away. No one expected the little girl to still be alive. She was though, and now she was home.

Tod was sitting next to the old woman, his eyes puffy. Dried tears were still on his cheeks. Tod looked up, noticing the group coming toward them. His eyes locked onto his little cousin. Nana was already pulling herself up from the bench. She stiffly walked down the small stairs, taking only a couple of steps. Her eyes were wide in shock.

Drake lowered Nelly to the ground, letting her stand on her own two feet. She only got a few steps toward her family when Tod rushed past the old woman, crashing into the child. He hugged her tightly, his tears renewed. Only this time, they were tears of joy. When he released the small child, Nelly ran to her nana with her arms wide open.

Drake noticed the doll had been forgotten, dropped on the packed dirt when she was lowered to the ground. He slowly picked it up and walked toward the child.

Bending down to Nelly, he handed her the doll. The child hugged him tightly. It wasn't for the doll; it was for saving her. She had grown attached to him in the short time she had been in his care.

Releasing the small girl, "We need to speak, Mayor Ivan. I will meet you at the inn," Drake said calmly as he stood up and walked away.

Nana rushed up to Drake before he could get too far, "Wait!" she called. He turned around. Not giving him a chance to say anything, she wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tightly. "Thank you. Thank you for saving my baby."

Drake didn't say anything. He just nodded, then motioned for his friends to follow. They headed to the inn to get something to eat and make sure they had another room for the night. It was too late to leave, and he needed to get more information before they headed out again. After what he saw, he wasn't so sure that the cabin he had received from the Dimension Master was going to be enough to keep the monsters out.

The boys walked into the inn. Mary was cleaning one of the tables when she looked up at them and smiled.

Before she could say anything, Drake spoke first. "We need rooms for tonight. One for each of us."

The woman's smile grew. "Your rooms you stayed in last night are cleaned and ready. You can use the same rooms if you like," she offered.

"Thank you, that will work. We would like something to eat as well. We haven't eaten since this morning. Mayor Ivan will be here soon to join us as well." After a few moments, he continued. "How many gold coins will that be?" He had no idea of the value of gold coins in this dimension.

They had received coins after they had fought bandits. They had plenty. Since everything wasn't prepared ahead of time, Drake didn't feel comfortable having things handed to them for free.

The woman was a little taken aback. She answered without thinking. "There are three meals served each day to guests. For three rooms, plus meals, would be one gold coin," she stated.

Drake walked forward, pulling out several gold coins, and handed them to her. "For all our expenses," he stated simply. I know you gave us supplies as well. When she looked in her hand, there were four gold coins.

"This is too much!" she protested.

Drake shook his head. "We may be staying for more than one night," he explained.

Just then, Ivan walked in. Immediately, he walked to his regular table and sat down. Drake and his friends followed as Mary disappeared into the kitchen to prepare a meal.

After they were all sitting and waiting for their meal, Drake looked at Ivan, his voice calm. "The monsters," he started, "explain why you believe they can't touch wood or stone?"

Ivan shrugged, "They never touch buildings. They avoid them."

Drake sucked in a long breath. "When we went to their lair, it was a village of tree houses. All the structures were made from wood. I looked at an axe they had. The axe head was made out of stone. If they crafted the axe, then they can touch stone. What I'm wondering is why they are able to touch the wooden structures they built, but not the homes and buildings here. Unless I'm missing something, when everyone goes inside thinking they will be safe, they're not as safe as they think they are."

Mike and Chad sat quietly, listening. They were taking in what Drake was concerned about. It made sense.

"When we reached the monster's village. And that's what it was. It was a village in the trees. We found Nelly in one of the structures. Since someone witnessed her being taken, finding her confirmed that the ones from the village in the trees were the ones that took her. It confirms that the village belongs to the same monsters you spoke of. From outside the village, there was no sign of anyone or anything there. It was as if the only ones there were the prisoners who were waiting to be prepared for food."

"Prisoners?" Ivan asked. Understanding that the statement implied that there was more than one.

"Nelly wasn't the only one there. There was also a bandit. I killed him. After I freed him, he attempted to take my life. He gave me no choice. As I was saying, there was no one visible. There were no stone statues suggesting they turned to stone. We would have stayed and investigated, but we needed to get Nelly safe. We couldn't guarantee her safety if we had to fight a village full of monsters. I need to know how you know they turn to stone. Why do you believe they can't enter a residence without being invited? I need to know everything you do and how you came about this information about these monsters. That village didn't feel right. Something was off. We just couldn't determine what it was. If what you think you know is false, then there is no one safe in this town."

Ivan frowned.