

## Dimension Master

### Chapter 16: 16: Threats

An underground structure in the depths of the dimension was clouded in a hot mist. Underground pools of lava flowed slowly through the deep caverns. The sound of water rushing through the caves could be heard echoing off the walls. The heat and moisture were causing a thick steam to cloud the entirety of the cave system.

It was an underground city. It was a settlement for the creatures that lived there, creating a perfect habitat that was safe from enemies. Not many could withstand the heat of the cavern system. Livable structures had been carved out of the cavern's moist walls.

Smooth walkways were covered in a moist layer of water and sulfur from the hot steam. They snaked around the underground settlement like roads. Heated mist swirled throughout the cave system, keeping every surface moist and hot.

There were creatures everywhere, both male and female, going about their business. All avoided the largest cavern, giving it a wide berth.

This cavern in particular resembled a throne room. A large dais with a bone throne stood in the center. Two long steps were carved roughly into the stone. A hunched figure bowed deeply, on the lower step. A tall figure stood above him. His arms were folded; his eyes narrowed in anger. His horns were moist from the heated mist that swirled throughout the settlement.

"What!" The man yelled, kicking the messenger in the head. The small figure, hunched over, bowing in submission, was thrown back, falling off the step. He quickly came forward, continuing to bow, and nearly slipping on the moist floor.

"The heir, he...." The figure tried to repeat himself, but was stopped as he was kicked again. He was not given the chance to continue.

"Please, master, let me fix this!" the figure pleaded. His bony fingers trembled as he bowed low, his hands held up as if in prayer. "The heir hasn't received his power yet. We can stop him from completing the trials."

The man kicked the messenger again, the figure falling from the steps of the dais. He scrambled up, pulling the hood of his cloak back over his small horns. It had fallen back after being kicked. "There's still time!" he pleaded, continuing to bow.

Ignoring the messenger, the man stormed out of the large throne room, leaving the hunched figure alone. Slowly standing, the messenger turned his head, watching his master disappear deeper into the settlement. "I will fix this. I will fix this for master."

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## **Draco Town**

Drake and his friends had just returned from rescuing Nelly, Tod's little cousin. They had delivered the little girl to her cousin Tod and her Nana safely, completing the quest. Drake wanted to try out his new skill, Whirlwind, but there was no time.

Drake was now sitting across from the mayor, his two friends sitting beside him as they waited for Mary to finish preparing their meal. After reporting what they had seen and the discrepancies in the information they had received, Drake had demanded answers from Ivan.

Ivan was frowning, his face pale. "I don't know how we received the information. It has been passed down for decades. None of us in town has seen the creatures turn into stone. Why would we? We could easily destroy them if they did that here. They take villagers who are out after dark and leave."

"What about entering a home without permission?" Drake pressed.

Ivan looked up at Drake, his eyes passing to Chad and Mike, then back to Drake. "We don't know. That is just something that was passed down with each generation."

Drake crossed his arms. His eyes narrowed at the mayor. "So, you're saying that no one in town has ever confirmed any of the information that has been passed down?"

Sighing, Ivan nodded slowly.

"Seems to me like you need to make some preparations in the event those things attack or go against this so-called information you have. If the fact that they can't enter a home uninvited is a lie, every life in this town is in jeopardy. I think the goal should be a way to protect everyone from these monsters." Drake looked at his two friends. "Do you two agree?"

Both boys nodded, but didn't say anything. They were somewhat in awe at Drake's personality change. He was being direct and taking the leadership role with ease. He was taking charge without a hint of hesitation. His shy demeanor was completely gone.

Drake sat quietly, thinking. He needed to come up with an idea on how to protect the villagers. The problem he was facing was that the monsters came from the air. None of his skills could create a dome barrier to keep threats out. It was a fleeting thought, but in this moment it was a useless one.

With a sudden thought, Drake looked up at Ivan. "I think I've come up with another possibility. One that could become a very large problem. What if they don't turn to stone? What if they only attack at night to hide their numbers or even their appearance? Lastly, what if they decide to attack during the day?"

Ivan's face paled further. The young heir gave him a lot to think about. He was opening up possibilities, things that scared him. He was the mayor, so he was very protective of his people. If the information they all knew was false, it would make it difficult to protect them.

Mary came out with dishes of food, breaking the silence. Seeing the group troubled, she quietly set the food on the table, then placed the plates and cutlery and quickly left, not wanting to interrupt whatever they were speaking of. It appeared to be serious.

They slowly ate the food that was brought. Even Ivan ate slowly, eating much less than normal. Drake's words had rattled him. The realization that all they knew could very well be a lie troubled him. They say ignorance is bliss. Apparently, it was true.

"I wonder if these monsters are waiting for the time that the townsfolk become complacent, used to the routine of only being attacked at night, before they change it up and go all out when everyone here least expects it," Chad stated, stuffing a bun in his mouth.

Drake looked over at his friend. "If they did that, it would be a massacre. We need to plan for all contingencies. We need to prepare as if we're waiting for an attack that can come at any moment, day or night. We need to forget that they have only attacked this town at night, and assume that they could arrive at any moment."

Mike nodded. "Relearning, right?"

Nodding, Drake continued to eat his food. He was trying to think of a way to prepare the town for battle. One that could hit them at any time. Something in the back of his mind worried him that the gargoyles would retaliate for rescuing their prey. Deciding to voice it, he looked up at Ivan. "They may retaliate for rescuing Nelly."

Ivan's face grew paler. Getting up from his seat, he looked between the three boys. "I will notify the men. We may be a small town, but we do have a small army. It's only a couple of dozen men or so, but it's better than nothing. We can warn them so they can prepare. Come find me when you're done."

Ivan left the inn quickly, in a rush to warn his men. If the monsters were to retaliate for taking Nelly out of their treehouse village, and they could really launch an attack during the day, no one would expect it. Since the monster had always attacked at night, no one would see it coming. None of the information they had known from generation to generation was confirmed. Because of what the young heir had discovered, the

information they had might have been all a lie. Until the information was proven, they had no choice but to assume it was false.

After Ivan left, the boys quickly finished their meals. "I guess I'm going to have to put a pause on my quest to find the cave of valor. This is too important. I don't know why, but I feel protective of this town and its people. I want to find a way to ensure they're safe before we continue to the mountain."

Mike chuckled, "Yeah, you seemed pretty attached to Nelly."

Shrugging, Drake pulled open the door of the inn. Exiting the inn, Drake and his friends headed for the tavern. It was the most likely place where they would find Ivan.

As they entered the wide double doors of the tavern, Drake's eyes zoned in on a familiar man sitting at the bar with a stein in his hand.

The man turned his head, looking to see who had entered. His face paled, drained of all color when he saw Drake, smiling wickedly back at him.

## **Chapter 17: 17: Discrepancies**

Drake and the man at the counter made eye contact. The fear in the other man's eyes shone brightly. Drake just smiled, which made the man pale further when Drake began to casually stroll toward him, the smile not leaving his face.

Ivan was standing next to a long table, and he was talking to a large group of men. When he saw Drake walk toward the man at the counter, he excused himself from his group and rushed to intercept the young heir. He didn't want any trouble. Especially at a time when they all should be working together to prepare to defend the town.

Out of the corner of his eye, seeing the mayor approaching, Drake held one hand up to stop him. His eyes didn't stray from his target.

Stopping in front of the man, Drake's smile grew. "I believe you owe me something," Drake declared.

The man gulped.

"After all," Drake continued. "We did bring back Nelly, alive and well. Didn't you say she was already dead?"

All eyes turned to the confrontation. Some had witnessed their discussion from before. Many were merely curious about what would take place, and others were expectant of a show of power from the young Dimension Master.

The large room grew silent as everyone listened to the conversation between Drake and the man and watched, waiting for what would happen next.

Drake's eyes started to glow a soft green. A light shining through the emerald of his eyes. "You're Gavin," Drake smiled. "Let me tell you something about me, Gavin. I have a way of knowing things. You can call them instincts if you want. I knew before we left this morning, without a doubt, that I would find Nelly alive. I was right, of course. It was my instincts, if you will, that told me your name. I won't profess to know everything, but if I say something is true without a doubt, then it's true. With other things, I can throw hunches and possibilities, but if I don't know it for a fact, I will tell you that I don't know it for a fact." Drake's eyes grew brighter.

His friends were beside him, doing their best not to show a reaction. Both boys were holding back gasps of shock. This was the first time Drake's eyes had ever glowed.

Gavin gulped. There were very few, even in Draco, who knew his real name. They called him by a nickname. They called him Billy. By using his real name, Drake was making a point that he knew things that others didn't.

"Now, Gavin," Drake continued. "We had a deal. I won't collect just yet. Just remember that you owe me."

Gavin nodded, finding it hard to respond. He couldn't get his mouth to cooperate.

"You need to voice it, Gavin. I need to hear you say it."

"Y...Yes, I made a deal. I owe you s...something of y...your choosing," Gavin choked out. Gavin remembered clearly what Drake had said prior to them leaving for the monsters' lair.

Drake's grin widened as a soft voice floated through his head.

**{A Deal has been confirmed by Gavin. Do you accept?}**

**{yes or no}**

Drake mentally chose yes.

**{You have confirmed your deal with Gavin}**

**{New Quest detected: Collect debt from Gavin during a time of need}**

Drake knew that he couldn't collect just anything. Because of the quest, he had to wait until he had no choice but to ask something of the man.

After both Gavin's and Drake's deal was confirmed, the glow of Drake's eyes began to fade. He turned to Ivan. We're ready to help this town prepare for battle.

Mayor Ivan nodded, then led the boys to the long table. It was filled with burly men, all with weapons strapped to them. They held things like knives, swords, daggers, battle axes, and other various implements of war.

Drake and his friends, Mike and Chad, kept quiet, letting the mayor speak to his men. The men present would then pass the information to the rest of the small army.

Ivan cleared his throat, preparing to speak. "We need to prepare for war." He stated firmly. "I have discovered that the information we have regarding the monsters may be false. The young Dimension Master and his cohort witnessed many things during their rescue mission that contradict the information that has been handed down to us over the decades."

All the men's eyes turned to Drake. It was as if they were expecting him to give a report of the contradictions. Drake figured it was to confirm what Ivan was saying.

Drake sighed, then nodded. "There was evidence that the fact they turn to stone is a ruse to make you complacent. There was also evidence that the aversion to wood and stone was also false. You can consider everything you know might be a lie. I'm not saying it is. I don't truly know. All I know is that there was evidence that it might be false. The only thing that was confirmed was that they eat flesh."

One man gulped. "Can I ask how that was confirmed?"

Drake folded his arms before speaking. His voice was hard as he remembered the structure that he found Nelly in. "When I found her, Nelly and a man were each in small cages. The room they were in resembled a slaughterhouse. There was a large butcher block in the center with huge knives designed to cut through blood and flesh everywhere. The entire structure was painted in blood. Both old and new blood. Nelly and the man were waiting in that room to be butchered like cattle."

Another man spoke up. "What happened to the other man? You only came back with Nelly."

With his arms still folded, Drake looked at the man who spoke. "After I freed him, the man attempted to take my life, so I killed him. He gave me no choice."

Quiet gasps were heard throughout the room. Gavin gulped. He was still afraid of what Drake would ask for when he came to collect his debt. Knowing that the young man killed someone made his fear grow.

Mayor Ivan continued. "Knowing the discrepancies in the information we have, there is a large possibility that the monsters will attack Draco Town in retaliation for rescuing Nelly. We have to prepare for if they attack us during the day."

Drake cut in to explain. "The monsters know that you believe them to be stone during the day. Since they know you wouldn't normally expect it, we believe that during the day is when they will attack."

"How do you know they don't turn to stone?" one man shot out.

Drake smiled. "How do you know they do?" he countered. "You believe them to have an aversion to wood and stone. We found Nelly in a wooden structure nestled in the trees. It appeared to be an entire village. Their tools were made of wood and stone. I even picked up an axe. The head of the axe was made from a carved stone. As for the belief that they turn to stone during the day, there was no evidence to show either. We saw no monster, nor statues of monsters. We have to prepare just in case. The best thing we can do is assume everything known about them is false until proven otherwise. It's safer that way."

"Basically," Mike stated, annoyed by the men's argument. "If you wait to be prepared for an attack at night and they come during the day when you would not expect it, you're all sitting ducks. If I were all of you, I would listen to what Drake says. It could save your life."

Chad was beside Mike, nodding in agreement. "Something about the monsters' lair was off. Nothing added up. I would rather be prepared for anything than not be prepared at all."

Drake scanned the small group, then turned to Ivan. "We'll be at the inn. You can come find us if you need us. We won't stay here and argue. My friends and I will do our own preparations."

Ivan nodded, then watched Drake and his friends walk out of the tavern.

Once outside, Chad turned to Drake. "What kind of preparations do we need to do?"

"I need to practice using my skills. I have one that I haven't used yet. It's level one whirlwind. I want to see what it does. I think I want to see if I can combine some of my skills. It might make them stronger. I also have that whip. I didn't show you, but there was a bow in my cuff. It matched my robes, so I know it was meant for me. I need to learn how to shoot it. You two have your weapons to train with, too. We need to practice and figure out a way to work together that will give us the best chance of survival." Drake looked between his friends. "If these gargoyles are as strong as I think they are, I don't want to lose my friends. Stay alive, okay?"

Both boys nodded solemnly as they continued to the inn.



## Chapter 18: 18: Preparations

Drake looked up at the sky, looking for signs of the gargoyles. There was nothing yet to see.

He and his friends had their armor on, weapons in hand. Chad was trying to teach Drake how to shoot his bow. They had placed old bottles on tree stumps to practice with. Drake was aiming at the bottles, trying to hit them. They had been at it for nearly an hour. Drake was having difficulty. The target felt too small.

Chad had argued that if he learned to shoot a small target, it would make the bigger ones even easier.

Sighing, Drake continued.

Mike was nearby, swinging his sword and getting used to the feel of its weight and abilities. He had discovered that he could control the energy that came from the sword. There was lightning energy, white energy, and wind energy that he had access to. He had a wide grin on his face as he trained.

Drake wanted to practice with his whip, but he was more focused on his bow skills. He needed to be able to shoot with a practiced aim. Like Mike's storm sword, he knew that his whip had multiple attributes.

Drake stood looking at his target, his bow at his side. He had an idea that would help if he could make it work. Holding up his bow again, as he pulled to produce his green arrow, he focused on the arrow made of green energy. Visualizing a whirlwind at its tip and a fireball in the center of the whirlwind, he let the arrow fly.

The arrow hit the bottle, exploding on contact. The stump burst into splinters. He had combined the whirlwind and fireball to create an explosion, using the arrow made of green energy to propel it. The whole thing was successful. 'I'll think all call you... Explosive arrow,' he thought.

As soon as he thought it, a soft voice floated through his mind.

**{You have created a new skill. You have created Explosive Arrow}**

Drake smiled, turning to his friends. They were looking at the exploded tree stump with small shards of glass shattered around it. Their features were in shock.

"How did you do that?" Chad asked, excitedly, wanting to do the same. His features dimmed after Drake's explanation.



"I combined two of my skills. I used Whirlwind and Fireball to create the explosion. The arrow was just to direct it. It was only an experiment, but it seems to have worked," he said, grinning.

Just then, Ivan was seen coming toward them.

Mike and Chad went to Drake's side, waiting for Ivan to get to them.

Ivan stopped in front of the three boys, addressing Drake. "We have men in the towers. They'll ring the bell if they see anything coming our way."

"How many men in each tower?" Drake asked. He was trying to analyze if they had thought the tower guard through.

"There are two men in each tower. One to ring the bell while the second defends him," Ivan stated. "All men have their armor on and weapons ready. That includes those waiting for the warning signal. There are two equal shifts. Half of them are resting. If the bell is heard, they will come out and defend. Even those who are sleeping have their armor on and weapons ready," Ivan explained. "If there are no problems, the two shifts will switch places, letting those who are currently on patrol rest. They will trade off in intervals."

Drake nodded. It was a good plan. It allowed them to stay rested at least until there was an attack. "What about night protection? Since we don't know if the information about not entering dwellings without permission is true, preparing for either scenario will be needed. If the monsters really can't enter without permission, the towers need to be retrofitted to protect the men on lookout. What is happening to help that?"

Mayor Ivan frowned. "I need to go take care of that. There are men currently in the tower. If you hear a large bell ring, it's the warning. Each tower has its own bell. Whatever direction the ringing is coming from is where the threat is."

Drake nodded. "If we hear the bell, we'll come and help. Just in case these monsters can enter homes, make everyone go inside and hide in their cellar earlier than they normally would. Even warn them to hide if they hear the bell. That will give them time to hide themselves inside and secure their cellar door so it can't be opened from the outside. I don't want to take chances."

Ivan nodded. Everyone had a small cellar. They stored their food supplies inside it. They could easily secure it and attempt to stay safe. "I'll go notify the town's people, do something about the lookout towers, and whatever else we can think of that will help."

Drake and his friends watched Ivan rush off. Mike turned to Drake. "What do you want to do. The only thing I can think of that we can do right now is help them fight when this place is attacked."

After looking up at the sky, Drake continued with his practice. Instead of using his new skill, he wanted to shoot the bow normally as accurately as possible. He set up a new stump with a fresh bottle only made from what looked like tin, and began his practice.

Mike continued working with his sword as Chad kept his eyes between Drake and the sky. He had to make sure Drake learned correctly. What he had felt at the gargoyles' lair made him uneasy. It felt off, but he couldn't figure out why.

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Back in Drake's room, three men stood at the computer screen watching the three boys practice with their magical weapons.

"They're doing rather well, don't you think?" One of them stated. His voice radiated pride.

The Dimension Master studied the screen. "They are doing exceptionally well. They are proving to be well-adjusted to what they are going through. Their decisions are geared to help those around them. Unlike many who would only focus on the main quest and ignore the troubles of the people, the boys stop to help the people of the dimension. That is exactly the kind of individuals who need to take over for us," he stated proudly, then smiled. "The young one has finally discovered he can create new skills. I'm pleased. It took me much longer when I went through the trials."

The screen showed the town's folk rushing around, trying to prepare for battle. They didn't have many warriors in the small town, but they were doing well in preparation. The three men studying the screen were watching the preparations.

The third man looked at the Dimension Master, worry in his gaze. "Are you going to help them when the gargoyles attack. I don't believe the boys are strong enough yet to defeat them. If they die, they die for real."

Sighing, he turned to the man. His emerald green eyes glowed brightly. "It's forbidden. I can only grant help if there is a quest to reward. I can use the reward to help. Other than that, there is nothing I can do. Not even for the young one."

The first man, still looking at the screen, spoke softly. It was a whisper. His worry was evident as well. "Drake received the quest for the deal he made with Gavin. What about giving help as the reward when he completes it?"

The Dimension Master sighed. "I can, but only if he completes it at a time when it can be used to help. If he completes the quest and it's too soon or too late, there is nothing I can do." Still watching the screen, he spoke more to himself than to the two men beside him. "They are smart, I have faith they will get through this."

The first man suddenly spoke. What about giving a reward when a gargoyle is slain? If it's timed correctly, it could save their lives," he suggested, worried about one of the boys in particular.

The second man nodded, agreeing.

The Dimension Master stared at the screen, his emerald eyes glowing brightly. He was thinking deeply, then suddenly looked between them. "If there is an opportunity to save them, regardless of which one, I will do it. All three of them will be fighting. Rewards are given to all of them through Drake's system. The rewards, if timed correctly, I will do everything I can to save them. I must warn you, though. I can only help if the boys give me an opportunity through the rewards."

Both men nodded in relief. They had known the Dimension Master since birth. As a group, they had grown up together, just like the boys on the screen. And just like Drake and his friends, they had gone through the trials as well. The problem was that there were a lot more things going on for Drake than there were for the three observers.

## **Chapter 19: 19: Attack**

It had been an hour since Mayor Ivan left the three boys. Suddenly, the sound of the warning bell rang. The man in the tower was ringing it as hard and as fast as he could. He yanked the rope frantically to get the citizens' attention, needing them to get to safety so he could stop and protect himself from the coming threat.

The man's partner held his sword tightly, ready to fight and defend his home. Looking at the ground below the tower, they could see the villagers scrambling to get to safety. The mayor had already given instructions to hide and lock themselves in their cellar.

Ivan looked up at the sky. "The young master was right. The sun is still out, and these monsters are not stone." He said aloud, as he scanned the village, seeing the citizens rushing into their homes, their doors slamming shut behind them.

Pulling the sword from his back, he readied himself for battle.

As the bell rang, a soft voice floated through Drake's mind.

**{Quest detected: Save Draco Town from the gargoyle horde}**

Drake and his friends look up to see Dark dots appear in the sky. Drake frowned. "That's one theory proven. Gargoyles don't turn to stone like these people believe. I bet the other things they believe are false also."

Mike and Chad nodded in agreement as they prepared to fight. Mike readied his sword, Drake and Chad their bows. Drake had his whip wrapped around his wrist, just in case he needed it.

The three boys rushed toward the sound of the bell. Stopping briefly, Chad and Drake pulled their bows, aiming for the descending gargoyles. There were two of them coming swiftly toward them. Their large wings spread wide, blotting out the sun.

Chad's arrow hit one of them in the head, exploding it. The body crashed to the ground, then burst into a cloud of light particles. Drake's glowing green arrow hit one of them in the chest. Blood burst from the wound. The monster was still alive. Aiming again, he shot, this time hitting it in the heart.

**{A member of your cohort has slain a Gargoyle; your cohort grows stronger}**

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

**{You have slain a gargoyle}**

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

After the two bodies fell from the sky, bursting into particles of light as they fell, the boys continued, rushing toward the location where the attack was taking place.

Taking only a few steps, a large figure landed behind them. His large wings spread as if ready to grab one of them and escape. Drake turned around, using the same techniques as he used on his arrows; he sent a whirlwind with a fireball, nestled in its center. Drake sent it flying toward the large gargoyle. The flaming whirlwind came crashing into the large monster, exploding on impact. The massive figure was thrown back, crashing against a large tree. Red blood burst through his chest. There were pieces of flesh missing. It wasn't dead.

Pulling itself up, the gargoyle extended its long, sharp claws. Its eyes narrowed with rage. Drake put his hand up, firing another, using the same spell, aiming for its face.

The flaming wind flew through the air so fast the gargoyle had no time to react.

The massive gargoyle's head exploded as the spell smashed into it, showering the area with blood and flesh. Light particles exploded around them. The gargoyle was dead.

A soft voice floated through Drake's mind.

**{You have slain a gargoyle}**

**{You have received a reward}**

**{You have received a life token +1}**

"What the hell is a life token?" he said aloud. Drake looked around where the gargoyle had been, looking for the token in question, but found none.

The boys ran forward, joining the battle. Town soldiers were fighting frantically, trying to survive. There were too many monsters.

Mike swung his sword, activating its power as he sliced through monster after monster.

Drake kept hearing messages float through his mind. He received three life tokens and multiple mana. Nothing else. The increased mana helped him throw spell after spell. Each time his spells grew too small to be beneficial, he was renewed with more mana.

There were bodies of monsters all around them. It would seem that if the soldiers killed them, they would not disperse into light particles.

Chad shot his arrows at a rapid pace. With each kill, his speed grew.

With Mike, with each kill, the powers of his sword grew sharper, larger. It would slay his foe more easily. In the throes of battle, the boys grew stronger.

With the boys back-to-back, they defended each other. It seemed the gargoyles were focusing on Drake. This made it easier for the soldiers of the small town to survive. Not so much for the three friends.

Drake shot spell after spell, and light particles floated as each kill was made. Suddenly, the voice floated through his mind.

**{A member of your cohort is near death. Would you like to use a life token?}**

**{yes; no}**

Drake's face paled, briefly looking behind him at his two friends. Chad was on the ground. Blood pooling around him. Mike was still fighting, slicing down one after the other.

"YES!" he screamed aloud. He was panicked, afraid for his friend. Drake now knew what the life tokens were used for and was thankful for receiving them.

Drake stayed close to Chad, trying to fight the gargoyles. Chad's body began to quiver, the pooling blood disappearing. He was healing. His smooth, pale face, regaining its color slowly. The large gash on his chest began to shrink. It slowly disappeared, out of existence. Once healed completely, Chad sat up slowly before looking up at Drake. There was shock in his eyes. "You saved me, how?"

"A life token," he said, in between spells. Drake was still fighting, throwing spells nonstop. He was breathing heavily, sweat pouring down his face. He was exhausted and could barely speak. "I only have two more."

Chad slowly stood up, picking his bow off the ground, and reentered the fight. He felt renewed as if he hadn't fought at all. With a small smile, he lifted his bow and pulled.

As for Mike, his face was dripping sweat. His powerful swings slashed through the gargoyles with ease. Exhaustion was apparent in his features. It was adrenaline that was keeping him fighting.

Drake was doing his best, but was having difficulty. His exhaustion was overwhelming. With all the gargoyles on the ground, no longer in the air, he switched his bow for his whip. Throwing spells with one hand and his whip in the other, he cut through the monster easily.

The sound of fighting stopped. Those fighting the three boys backed off as well. Drake and his friends stood ready.

The gargoyles regrouped, and they walked toward Drake and his friends. The largest stood in the center with the rest flanking him. He was directly in front of Drake.

Drake's eyes glowed brightly with soft green light, narrowing at the large gargoyle. He had his whip ready to strike and a spell at the ready. He was getting good at throwing spells without needing their names.

With eyes locked, the large gargoyle grinned. His long fangs extended out of his wide mouth. A chuckle rumbled through the gargoyle's throat before his massive leathery wings extended, and he leaped into the air. The others followed their leader, disappearing into the afternoon sun.

**{Quest: Save Draco Town from the Gargoyle Horde complete}**

**{You have received a reward}**

**{You have received Stat: Strength}**

**{Strength +1}**

**{You have received a System reward}**

**{Information system is now activated}**

Drake turned to his friends. "We need to eat something and rest. I don't like the way that thing laughed. I think he will be back, and soon."

Mike and Chad nodded. Mike was leaning on Chad, trying to stay upright.

"Go to the inn and get Mary to prepare something. I'll be there soon. I need to see Ivan," Drake said, then walked past his friends and headed toward the mayor.

There were multiple bodies on the ground. Many of the bodies were townspeople, and men who had chosen to fight rather than hide. Mayor Ivan was hunched over, his bloody sword resting loosely in his hand. He looked up to see Drake. "You were right," Ivan breathed out. "They came during the day. They don't turn to stone."

Drake nodded. "They will be back. I know they will. We need to rest. You need to see if anyone is missing. That includes those who fought. You need to see if any of the people hiding were taken or their homes even entered. This will tell us if they can enter without permission. We didn't win this battle. They just left, and I have a hunch they left to get reinforcements."

Drake turned and headed for the inn where his friends were. He was exhausted. The fact that one of his friends nearly died scared him. Knowing how exhausted they were, he knew that two life tokens might not be enough if the gargoyles returned before they were rested enough to fight at their full strength.

## **Chapter 20: 20: Waiting**

Drake walked into the inn. His steps were determined. The thoughts of the battle played through his mind like a virus, spreading fear and worry for the future. His gleaming emerald eyes focused on his friends, who were sitting at the small wooden table. Sandwiches that were stacked like a small mountain on a large plate were in the center. Mike and Chad were each eating one of them as he entered.

Drake lowered himself into the chair at the small table. After grabbing a sandwich, he turned his head slowly and looked at his friends. There was a slight hesitation in his tone. "I think our quest to find the cave of valor is going to have to wait. We can't leave these people until we know that those monsters aren't coming back. I have a hunch that the gargoyles left to get reinforcements. We need to eat quickly and get some rest." He paused for a moment before speaking again. "I know you want to find a way home. I do too. Everything in me says we will be able to get back if we complete the quest, but Something in me wants to help them. I can't just walk away from them."

There was no argument from the two boys. They agreed with their friend's decision. Nodding in agreement, the boys finished their meal quickly, the small mountain of sandwiches quickly disappearing. After the plate was empty, the trio went to their rooms to wash up and sleep.

When they got into bed, they were fully dressed. Their boots were beside their bed, positioned to slip on quickly if the warning bell was rung while they were sleeping.

Chad and Mike quickly fell asleep; they were too exhausted.

Drake lay silently in the dark, staring up at the raw wood ceiling. He knew his friends wanted to go home. He felt like he was letting them down. The image of the little girl Nelly, flashed through his mind. It was the image of the moment he had found her. She



was hunched in the cage with blood and flesh around her. The walls were painted with the blood of those the gargoyles had slaughtered. Tears ran down her cheeks as she clutched her doll for comfort. Her little thumb was in her mouth.

He wondered if she had seen the gargoyles slaughter their prisoners or if they had rescued the innocent little girl in time. She was too young to witness such violence. He would never know unless Nelly indicated herself.

In the short time he had known the child, he had grown attached to her. He didn't want to see her get hurt or be scared if he could prevent it.

Drake slowly closed his eyes, letting sleep take him. His last thoughts were about how he was going to save this town. The threat was far too large and dangerous. He had just received what small powers he had. He knew it wasn't enough. The look in the leader's eyes told him that his current powers were not enough. He needed to get stronger...and fast.

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Back in Drake's room back home, in the real world, the Dimension Master and the two men beside him were watching the flat screen.

"The life tokens were a good idea," The dimension master said aloud. "It saved Chad's life. Drake only has two remaining. I can't give more than I have already given him. I am only able to give one for each of them."

The man to his right spoke softly, his voice subdued. "Thank you. I am grateful."

The Dimension Master nodded in acknowledgement, his green eyes shining as he watched the boys finish their meal.

The man on the Dimension Masters' left side spoke next. His voice was quiet. Worry laced his every word. "When will the gargoyles attack again? Will the boys have time to recharge?"

The Dimension Master's gaze did not waver from the three teenagers. His tone was calm, quiet. "The screen only shows the boys. It will only show Drake if Mike and Chad are not near him. As a cohort, they stick together. That is a good thing. It allows us to watch them all. It won't show anything else," he answered.

The man on the Dimension Master's Left spoke again. His tone was pleading. "This battle is beyond what they are supposed to be doing. Can we go in and help them? This should be our battle, not the boys," he pleaded. "We can help them fight, then leave so they can continue with their quest."

Sighing deeply, his eyes gleamed with a bright green light as he focused on the young heir. A small smile spread on his handsome face. "That is not possible. We can't fight for them in their coming battle. However, it gives me an idea..."

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As the trio slept, the twin suns disappeared, turning the day into night. The streets of Draco town were silent. The residents were hiding inside their cellars, locked in from the inside. Each hunched in dark corners, clutching those with them, their fearful eyes staring at the locked door above them.

Some tried to sleep; others were too afraid.

The cellars were large, underground rooms inside the homes of the town's residents. Each home was locked, windows barred with rusty, locked shutters on the inside of the house. Small bells hung like clusters of grapes from the locks and doors. They served as warnings to those hiding inside. A warning that the threat had made it inside.

Outside in the night, sinister shadows played in the soft glow caused by the flicker of light of the oil lamps that lined the empty streets.

In the watchtowers, men stood, staring at the sky. One with his bow held tightly, an arrow notched, ready to shoot. The other, his hand gripped the long rope attached to the bell. He was ready to alert the soldiers the moment the threat was upon them. The men peered into the darkness, watching for movement amongst the stars. Their expressions were grim.

In the barracks, a row of beds held sleeping men. Their arms clutched tightly to their weapons. Each man was fully armored, ready to fight as soon as the warning was given.

All the windows in the barracks were shuttered, locked tightly. Bells hanging from their rusted locks. There was no way inside, only the windows. The small door led to a front room. There were several men scattered. Their weapons in hand. The windows were shuttered, bells hanging from their locks.

There were two doors to the main room. One led to the sleeping soldiers, the second to the outside, where the danger would be coming from. Unlike the homes in the small town, these doors were locked on the inside, barred by a long metal bar through two hoops. It was the fastest lock to open. The soldiers needed to be able to exit quickly if they were attacked by the flying monsters.

If they couldn't get out of the building to defend the townsfolk, the people they protect could be taken or killed.

Mayor Ivan, locked inside the inn, paced the dining room in the dark, his sword at his back. There was not a single flame to light his way. Mary had left him food. She was hiding like most of the townspeople. Lying on a cot in the corner of the inn's cellar, she tried to sleep. Her eyes moved unconsciously to the small cluster of bells hanging from the lock on the cellar door.

The entire town was silent; no one spoke. They were afraid to be heard.

The night grew still. The silence lingered. Not a single sound could be heard. Even the insects appeared too afraid to make a sound. It was as if the entire town was holding its breath, waiting.

A single figure dropped lightly to the ground, not making even the hint of a sound. The figure was cloaked in darkness, invisible in the night. After turning its head left and right, it surveyed the area before looking up at the twinkling sky above. There was no movement.

Staying in the shadows, the figure walked silently, circling the small town. Every few feet, it dropped a stone. Runes carved into the surface of the stone glowed softly from its smooth surface. The figure continued.

Every few moments, the figure looked up into the stars before continuing its work. Silently, it made its way around the small town. After placing the last stone around the perimeter of the small town, the cloaked figure made its way to the center.

The figure stood silently in the exact center of the small town. Placing a large glowing stone in the center, it caused those surrounding the town to turn dark. A burst of energy extended from the many stones and rushed toward the larger one. Once the energy was reached, a burst of light flashed, then the center stone turned dark. The light of the rune was completely gone.