

## Dimension Master

### Chapter 36: 36: Back on the Road

Chad slowly took in his surroundings, seeing the dirt, grass, and bushes filling the clearing. A gentle breeze blew through the trees in front of them, rustling their leaves. The trees were only twelve feet away. There wasn't even a drop of water that could be seen. "How?" he choked. "How is it possible?"

Drake bent down to speak to his friend at eye level. He knew how Chad's phobia affected him. He couldn't even go to the river. Even swimming pools were out of the question. "It's an illusion. My lantern apparently allows you to see through illusions."

Chad looked around them at everything. Remembering the suffocating fear that consumed him from seeing them surrounded by water made him grit his teeth. "I hate this place. I hate it. I want to go home." Tears fell from his eyes. He wasn't normally a crier, but the experience was too much for him to handle.

Mike sat next to him, breathing in a long breath. "We can go home if we can finish this quest. I don't know how, but I know for a fact that completing it will send us home."

"I know that too. It's like the information is instinctual." Drake added. "It's like how I knew that the hidden quest is a quest of ascension. I don't know how I know it, I just do."

With the little lantern glowing softly, the boys could see their surroundings as they truly were. It didn't seem to matter who held it; it worked on everyone within a short range.

The boys sat on the porch as they waited for Chad to compose himself. He was sitting in silence, looking at the trees, tears falling freely. After a while, he wiped the tears away and stood up. Drake and Mike saw that Chad was ready, so they stood up too.

Drake attached the lantern to his belt and looked over at his two friends. "Are you two ready to head back to the road so we can finish this damn quest and go home?" He was angry that his friends had to go through all these life-or-death situations. Because of Chad's phobia, he had to add fear and anguish to that list as well.

Nodding, the boys reentered the cabin to prepare to leave. They had to clean up their mess, extinguish the fire, and collect what they needed to carry on the road to the mountain.

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### In Drake's Room

The Dimension Master and his companion watched the boys deal with the illusion outside of the cabin. Drake had figured it out quickly. It took him only a matter of minutes, which made them smile. The illusion wasn't an easy thing to figure out.

"We stayed in that same clearing when we did the ascension quest. Didn't it take us three days to figure that out?" The blond archer asked. "We only figured it out by a stroke of luck. It was an accident."

The Dimension Master chuckled, nodding. He was smiling proudly. He watched the boys with a pleased expression, his green eyes glistening like expensive gems. "Drake is smart. He knows how to use his brain. He used what he learned in Draco Town to figure out the situation they are in."

The blond man chuckled loudly, watching as the boys tidied the cabin. His eyes were mainly focused on Chad, who was staring at his cup in disgust before gulping it down. He even winced as he swallowed. "We should have provided coffee for them. Chad likes his coffee."

This made the green-eyed man laugh. "I put some in the storage book, but Drake hasn't exactly gone through everything to find it yet. I can imagine Chad's face when he finds out they had coffee with them the entire time."

The three men laughed at the thought of what the boys would do when this information was discovered.

After a while, the boys left the cabin. Drake quickly stored it as they exited the clearing and passed through the thick woods. There was no danger around them. All three boys knew how fast danger could arrive. Sometimes it felt like it came out of nowhere.

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## **On the Road**

Drake stood on the road with Chad and Mike next to him. They had just reached the road after leaving the clearing. They stood still with weary expressions on their faces, looking toward the large mountain that resembled a giant dragon's head. The massive mountain cast a shadow that stretched across the wooded land.

They wanted to get the hidden quest over with, but all that had happened to them so far made them apprehensive about moving forward.

The road was lined with thick trees as they procrastinated, not wanting to walk toward the mountain. It was a breezy morning. The twin suns shone down, bringing warmth and light to the dimension. They could hear the sound of birds singing their morning song. It felt magical. That was, of course, if you didn't understand magic.

Those in the ordinary world would think it was a fairy tale. However, reality was that magic was terrifying and dangerous. The dimension was riddled with terrible monsters, beasts, and bandits. This place was no fairy tale. It was a nightmare that threatened to kill you at any second. Every step, every shadow, and movement promised an excruciating death.

Drake sighed heavily, then took his first step. His friends followed immediately after. As they walked, they kept their weapons ready. They knew that something could jump out at them any time. Sometimes there was a warning, like a growl, or they could hear it moving through the trees. Other times, there was no warning at all, only silence before being attacked. It could be beasts, bandits, or assassins. There were also the unknown enemies that kept hindering their progress to the mountain.

Drake thought back to the good times he had experienced in this realm. He realized that there really wasn't any. He had to watch his friend nearly die in a battle, rescue a young girl from the gargoyles, and deal with the enchantments and barrier in the town.

He suddenly smiled. He had grown somewhat attached to the little five-year-old, Nelly. She had become attached to him, too. If he ever returned home and could come back to Draco Town, he would remember to bring her a better doll.

'Wait, why am I thinking about coming back here? Am I an idiot?' Drake chastised himself.

The long road made his mind wander, thinking about all sorts of things. Most likely out of boredom. He smiled again, thinking about Nelly. Then there was Mayor Ivan. He liked the man. At first, one would think the man was just the mayor, but the short, fat man was surprisingly good with a sword. He had noticed during the gargoyle battle that he was well-trained. You wouldn't know it by looking at him. You had to see him in action to know the truth.

They had traveled for several hours before there was a sudden movement in the trees, breaking Drake out of his thoughts. Drake tensed. He could tell that his friends were doing the same. He slowly uncoiled his whip, letting it fall to the ground as he filled it with the soft green glow. He kept one hand free, ready to cast a spell.

Chad held his bow out, notching an energy arrow. The arrow glowed with a soft white light that grew brighter the longer he held it in place. His sword was in its scabbard, but the strap was unlatched, making it ready to use.

Mike had his gauntlets already on, his glowing white sword in his hand. Over the soft white glow, lightning formed, pulsing up and down the elegant blade. It crackled with an eerie sound.

Drake and his friends stood, watching the direction from which the sound of the beast had come. Drake let his eyes glow with a bright green light, then looked around at their

surroundings to make sure there was only one threat. There was nothing around them, nor above. There was only the beast in the trees. With his magical vision, he could see that the beast appeared double the size of the level 2 beast they had fought on the previous night.

Drake winced at the sight of the towering creature, his face turning pale. The beast had glowing red eyes. It was the same wolf-type beast as they had been encountering. He had started to wonder if there was only one type of beast.

"I think it's a level 3 beast," Drake warned. His voice was a little shaky. Fear radiated from him as he stared at the beast hiding in the trees. If they could barely defeat the level 2, how would they even survive the level 3?

Mike and Chad looked over at their friend, whose face was as white as a sheet of paper. "How do you know? We still can't see it."

Drake gulped, clearly afraid. Even his hand was shaking as he held his whip; its green glow grew brighter every second. "It has red eyes." That was all he said before the massive beast stepped out of the trees.

### **Chapter 37: 37: Level 3 Beast**

A towering form stepped out of the trees. Its menacing red eyes glowed as it gave them a deathly glare. Like the other beasts they fought, it resembled a wolf with a rat's tail. The fur was thick and black as pitch. There were swirls of red fur that glistened, like wet red blood.

The beast's fangs were long with jagged razor-sharp tips. Blood red saliva dripped from its long fangs, giving the appearance that it had just devoured its kill. Its saliva was thick and red, resembling fresh blood.

The beast towered over them, double the size of the level 2 beast. The beast growled, showing its rows of jagged, bloody teeth. It wasn't blood, it just looked like it was.

Chad was the first one to act; he shot his glowing arrow, then notched another. The arrow flew through the air, hitting the beast. He was aiming for the eyes, knowing that it was the weakest part of the beast. If he could blind it, it would make it easier to defeat it. At least that's what he was thinking.

His arrows did nothing.

Switching to his sword, he prepared to fight, his expression grim. Drake slashed his whip. It elegantly sliced through the air, and it made a high-pitched hum as it flew. The glowing whip hit first, slashing along its face. The whip followed, hitting inches apart. Two deep gashes appeared on the beast, blood dripping from its wounds.

The beast roared. It was hard to tell if the beast was in pain or just angry. Its eyes narrowed. It was definitely angry.

Drake threw an explosive whirlwind, which hit the beast. All aims were at its face. The beast's hide was too thick. They already knew that. The spell exploded, stronger than before. The beast was pushed back, startled, but unharmed. He quickly pulled out his bow, shooting an explosive arrow. Trying to shoot it before the beast recovered. It hit seconds before it regained its footing, pushing him back once again. He shot another. Trying to hit the same spot, as it flew through the air, the soft voice floated to his mind. HE could barely hear what it said as he pulled his bow, sending another.

**{Explosive Whirlwind is now Level 2}**

**{Mana +1}**

**{Whirlwind is now Level 2}**

**{mana +1}**

**{Fireball is now Level 2}**

**{mana +1}**

The explosion blasted the beast back, but it was already getting used to the spell. Mike took this time to shoot out his electrified energy blade. The glowing ethereal blade left the sword, flying toward the beast, hitting it in the face. It was the same location Drake had been aiming for. It pushed the beast back, the electricity sizzling through the towering creature before disappearing into nothing. The beast was unharmed.

As Drake prepared another spell, the beast leaped forward, giving him no time to complete it. He slashed his whip, slicing through its snout. It roared as it landed. Less than a second from pinning him down, Drake rolled to the side. The massive claw barely missed him.

Chad and Mike rushed toward the towering creature, stabbing with their runed blades, giving Drake time to stand. His eyes glowed brightly in anger, the glowing green piercing through the veil of energy and magic. He found the monster's weakness.

Through his magical vision, lines of energy pulsed in waves through the beast. A single core pulsed deep within the beast like a heartbeat. He just had to figure out how to get to it.

Pulling his Emerald sword, Drake filled it with power. It pulsed and condensed, pulsed and condensed until a thin razor edge coated the blade. Thrusting forward, he pierced the beast. The thick fur gave too much resistance. He needed his blade sharper, stronger.

With one hand, he threw an explosive whirlwind, aiming for the pulsing core of the beast. As it exploded at its target, Drake condensed the energy again on his sword, making it sharper, not stopping until no more could be condensed. The explosion sent the beast flying; it was a powerful blow. The level upgrade on his skill helped. It was much stronger than the last time.

The blast burst at the beast's chest, the soft spot near the pulsing core. Fur exploded from the area, revealing soft flesh. The beast howled in pain, its red eyes glowing, narrowing in on its prey, then leaped.

Mike rushed in with his gauntlets, dragging the spikes through its underbelly, as he slid under the beast. Doing a rolling turn, he somersaulted, coming out into a stand, turning abruptly, with his glowing sword gripped tightly.

Blood from the beast dripped onto the road. The beast growled.

Chad switched back to his bow, aiming for the open wound. He shot his arrows in rapid succession as Drake shot his spells, both boys aiming for the same spot. From behind, Mike used the energy pulse of his sword to shoot bolts of enhanced lightning. The trio was sending a barrage of attacks from multiple directions.

The beast roared and howled, its massive claws stuck out at its enemies, but was stopped by the explosions. Drake's whip soared as he sent spell after spell, not giving the beast time to react. Between Chad's arrows, Mike's electrical jabs, and Drake's spells and whip, the beast could do nothing but howl.

Drake's green eyes glowed brighter; it was so bright that his figure couldn't be seen. He rushed forward, ducking under the flailing limbs of the towering beast, then, with all his might, shoved his glowing emerald sword into the open wound. The pulse of the razor-sharp sword shot through the beast, destroying the core. The beast burst into light particles, disappearing into nothing.

**{You have slain an evolving Level 3 beast}**

**{You have received a reward: Dimension Map}**

**{Strength +1}**

Drake fell to his knees, breathing heavily. His glowing eyes dimmed. Breathing in short, ragged breaths, he looked around, searching for his friends. They were both running toward him. Chad has his sword out, the blade shining with a white glow. He bent down and pressed the flat of his sword against Drake's back.

The warmth spread. Mike was pale as he looked at his friend.

Confused, Drake asked, "What's wrong? We won..." After he spoke, he noticed that Mike was trying not to look at his midsection, causing him to look down at himself. When Drake looked down, he tried not to throw up.

There was a large hole in his abdomen. In his charge to stab the beast with the emerald sword, the beast impaled him with its claws.

As the warmth of Chad's sword spread through his body, Drake tried not to pass out. Now that he saw his injury, the pain was overwhelming. Like fire, the pain burned.

Chad kept the sword in place; there were tears in his eyes. Drake knew that this was a bad wound. If the sword was able to heal him from the dagger, it should be able to heal him from this...right?

Mike moved closer, carefully resting Drake on his lap, with his abdomen up. Chad slid the flat of the sword carefully toward the injury, not willing to lift the sword.

"Stay awake, Drake. Stay awake," Mike pleaded. He was afraid that if Drake fell asleep, he would never wake up.

Chad said nothing. He was too busy willing the sword to heal Drake's wound. Tears were falling from his eyes as he held the glowing sword in place.

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The man with bright green eyes stared at the screen in horror as he watched his heir fight for his life. He did well in fighting the powerful beast. It was a level 3 beast on the cusp of being a Level 4. No, it wasn't the fight with the beast; it was that Drake was fighting for his life to stay alive from his injury.

Chad's sword was powerful, but the power determined how powerful the trio became. All of their swords' powers were linked to the collective power of the three boys. He wasn't sure the boys were strong enough to allow the sword to heal such a wound.

The system wasn't offering the life token. It was as if Drake didn't even have them anymore. If he did, the system should have given him the option to use one of them to save his own life. Drake should have two left. He had obtained three in total, the maximum amount that could be given under the circumstances. He had only used one. It was on Chad during the battle at Draco Town when they were fighting the gargoyles.

He wanted to go to the dimension and save his heir's life, but it was against the rules. It was a beast attack, not someone trying to prevent the quest from being completed.

His blond friend walked into the room and glanced at the screen. He froze in his tracks. His face paled as he watched his own heir try to save the young Dimension Master.



"They're strong. They have to be. He can save him. I know he can." He choked out. He was worried about the boys because if Drake dies, so would Mike and Chad.

## **Chapter 38: 38: Life and Death**

### **Chap 38: Life and Death**

Mike kept talking to Drake, trying to keep him awake as Chad pushed every ounce of power he had into saving his friend.

Drake lay bleeding and broken, his guts nearly spilling out as Chad pressed his healing blade to his wound, trying to heal him, ultimately saving his life.

Chad was sweating; it poured down his face as he focused on saving Drake. It was already getting late. They were stuck on the road, with Drake injured, unable to do anything if they were attacked. It was a dangerous time.

They had been lucky so far. Nothing had come out of the trees. They hadn't seen bandits either. The problem was that it would start getting dark soon, and they were out in the open.

Mike looked up at the sky and voiced his concern. "It's going to get dark soon. We need to find a place to hunker down. We can't do that here in the middle of the road.

Drake didn't want to be the reason they all died on the road. He felt that he needed to try to help. Letting his eyes glow, he looked around them. He could see a clearing in the distance. If Mike carried him, he could place the cabin when they arrived there. He just needed to stay awake long enough to do it. Drake knew that the sword Chad was using was keeping him alive. There was still too much pain to determine if it was actually healing him, though.

"T..Th..That way," he wheezed, trying to point his finger, but was not strong enough. "Cle..Clearing."

Mike understood, though. He looked up at Chad. "I'll carry him while you try to continue. We need to get to safety, or all your attempts to save him will be for nothing. It's life or death. I want to live. I want you to live, and I want Drake to live."

Chad nodded, then Mike carefully stood up with Drake still in his arms. He slowly walked in the direction that Drake indicated while Chad kept the sword on his wound.

It was a slow trek through the trees. Chad had to be able to keep the sword pressed to Drake, and Mike had to be careful not to jostle Drake due to the severity of his wounds. A wrong move could mean death for Drake.



The twin suns were setting as they approached the clearing. It had taken a long time to get there because of their slow pace; they had to walk. In the clearing, Mike turned his body so that Drake could see the clearing clearly.

"S..Sit..I..N..need both hands," Drake ordered. His voice was broken, having difficulty talking.

Mike did as he was told. Once they were on the ground, Mike had to help Drake move his hand so that he could take out the storage book. When he swept it out of the cuff, the book was on the ground. "R..Ri..Ribbon," Drake spoke. He needed the page turned to the cabin. The ribbon was pulled to that page so that it would be easy to find if they needed to get to it fast.

Using one hand, he opened to the page with the ribbon. The cabin was clearly seen on the page.

Drake swept his hand. It was barely, but still enough for the cabin to materialize in the clearing. After Drake replaced the book in his cuff, Mike carefully stood up and carried him to the door.

With his free hand, Chad tried to open the door, but it wouldn't open. Mike already knew he couldn't because he had tried in the last clearing. "Chad, move Drake's hand to the door handle and help him open the door. I'm pretty sure he's the only one who can open it."

With one hand still on the sword, the other, he gently grasped Drake's hand and set it on the door handle. Covering his hand with his own, Chad opened the door. They sighed in relief. They weren't sure what they would do if they were unable to get into the safety of the cabin.

Chad backed in first, keeping the healing sword on Drake's wound. Once in, Mike followed, with Drake in his arms. They had to move in a circle so that Chad could reach the door to close it, set the lock, and hang the bells.

Before they decided where to go next, Chad quickly closed the shutters next to the door and hung the bells. He was happy that they left the shutter locked in the rest of the cabin. It took a few minutes because he had to do everything with only one hand.

"To his bed," Mike stated. "Unless it's easier for you to use that sword on him on the sofa."

Chad looked between the bedroom and the sofa. "Sofa."

Since the location was selected, they set themselves up there. Mike sat on the sofa with Drake on his lap, stretched out on the sofa.

Chad was becoming pale, his sword starting to fade. He was quickly running out of energy. "I wish you could use a life token like you did on Chad," he grumbled.

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, the soft voice of the system spoke.

**{A member of your cohort requests to use a life token. Do you accept?}**

**{yes or no}**

Drake didn't hesitate. "Yes," he responded to the system.

Immediately, his body began to heal, and his wounds started to close, the flesh and skin knitting together. It was fast enough for the eye to see. The burning pain he had been experiencing was slowly fading.

Drake slowly turned his head, looking up at Mike. He was too weak, and the pain was still there, although it was much less than it was before. "You saved me. I know why I couldn't use one before," he started. He had to take a few slow breaths before he continued. "I used the first token, that's why it didn't give me an option. You spoke it and the system understood. It used it on me," he continued, then took a few more slow breaths. His head slowly turned toward Chad. "You are the only one who can use a token now. There is only one left. If you can heal with your sword, don't waste it unless it becomes too much." Sucking in a few more slow breaths, he continued talking to Chad. "If an injury is too much for your sword, that's when it should be used. This road is too dangerous."

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The Dimension Master watched the screen with his two friends. As soon as the blond archer saw the computer monitor, he called the third and final member of their small cohort. He needed to know that Mike was in danger, too.

Each of the three men had their own heir. Drake was the Dimension Master's heir, Chad was the blond archer's heir, and Mike was the bulky, muscular man's heir. Drake's survival meant the other two boys would survive. If he died, so would the other. They were all bound by the system and the dimension.

When Chad's sword started to fade, they knew it would be the end. It wasn't doing enough to heal Drake, only enough to keep him alive.

The three men heard everything. When Mike stated that he wished they could use a token on Drake to save him like Drake did for Chad, the three men had one thought. "We wish he could, too." None of them knew why the system wasn't offering it.

Moments after Mike's words, Drake's body began to repair itself. Of course, with Drake's sharp mind and deduction skills, he figured it out and voiced it immediately.

Now they knew it wasn't someone messing with the system; it was that each boy could use one token to save one of the others.

"They aren't even halfway to the cave. How are they going to stay alive if the beasts aren't even in their territory? That beast should have been on the other side of the bridge." The brown-haired swordsman asked. He was worried. There was only one chance left to save one. There was too much going on that shouldn't and they couldn't find a loophole to get involved.

The three men refused to leave the confines of Drake's bedroom, back at his home in the ordinary world. So much was happening that they were afraid to look away. They had all brought in sleeping bags so they could find a spot on the floor or Drake's bed. It was convenient that Drake had a large room and chose not to fill it with crap.

As they watched, the three boys went in for bed.

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Mike carried Drake, not taking any chances that he wasn't completely healed. He still looked pale. He had stopped next to the hearth so that he could shoot a flame into the logs, so he could cook something for them to eat. Chad was exhausted from trying to heal Drake, so he was sent to the bedroom with him. After Drake and Chad were settled, he went to make something for them to eat, making sure it was light enough for Drake to handle.

Mike ended up making a stew, using the ingredients Mary gave them on the first morning in Draco Town. He sat in front of the hearth as the stew cooked. His features grim. The longer they stayed in this dimension, the more he hated it. There were only two people his age he cared about, and both of them nearly died in a matter of days. One of them, twice.

## **Chapter 39: 39: Cabin**

Mike stood looking into the flames, lost in thought. The smell of his stew pulled him back to reality. He pulled the stew from its hook on the hearth and brought it to the counter to fill some bowls for him and his friends.

When he got into the room, Chad was sitting up, his back against the wall. Drake was doing the same on his own bed.

"I'm surprised your two aren't already asleep," Mike stated. He handed each of his friends a bowl and spoon before sitting down himself.

"We must be doing something wrong. My gut says that this quest shouldn't be like this. You said it was an ascension quest. I think the quest is for all three of us, not just you.

We have been working together, getting stronger, but we're still having trouble. You two almost died."

"Twice," Drake breathed. He was exhausted, but he needed food. The only thing they had to eat that day was breakfast before they left. "What we need to do is figure out how to get stronger, faster, without nearly dying. Yet I also think we need to complete the quest as fast as possible. I know you're right. It's not supposed to be like this."

"I have an idea, but you may not like it," Chad started. Mike and Drake turned to Chad, waiting to hear his idea. "What if you used your magic vision to see the danger so we can avoid it as we go?"

Drake thought about it for a second. "I could do that. I can at least help avoid some of it, but not all. The problem is that we need to get stronger. We have to fight beasts and bandits to do that. What if, when we get to the cave and we need to battle something or someone to take possession of the staff?"

Mike took a bite of his stew and nodded. He knew they needed to come up with a plan.

"Hey, during that last battle with the level 3 beast. Three of my skills went up a level. My fireball, whirlwind, and explosive whirlwind went to level 2. If I'm right, the more I use a skill, the higher the level. Another thing. Each time one of you kills something, it always tells me that my cohort grows stronger. Perhaps, I should use my skills on the beasts to level them up and let the two of you do all the killing?" Then he thought about it. "Do you feel stronger when I kill something or just when you two do it?"

Chad and Mike spoke at once. "I haven't paid attention." "Me either."

Drake sighed. "We're going to have to test that. Did either of you see anything that the beast dropped? It's supposed to be a dimension map."

Chad shook his head. "I didn't see anything. I saw you needed help, so I went straight to you."

"Same," Mike confessed.

Drake spoke to his system, trying to see if perhaps it was part of the system.

"System, show me the Dimension Map."

Nothing happened.

"System, show me the location of the system map."

A green thread appeared, leading him out of the cabin.

"Shit, I have to go get the map. We need it." Drake cursed.

"We're coming with you. Use your vision to avoid dangers. We've had enough of that for the day." Mike stated.

They quickly left the cabin and ran back to the road, following the green thread, leading to the map. Drake kept his magical vision open, hoping not to see danger. When they reached the road. The map was lying next to a tree on the side of the road. They had to cross the road to get it.

Drake quickly grabbed the map, then scanned the area once more. A beast was heading their way, but it was far enough away that they could run back to the cabin before it reached them. They had to hurry, though, or they would have to fight it.

"Beast, we need to run," Drake told his friend. He pointed in the direction it was coming from. It was fortunate that it was on the opposite side of the road that they needed to go.

The three teens ran as fast as they were able. Drake was happy that he didn't feel any pain from his previous injury. The token had completely healed him. It was as if it never happened.

As soon as they arrived at the cabin, Drake flung the door open, letting his friends in, before slamming it shut and setting the lock. Drake used his vision to see where the beast was. It was close by, still heading toward them.

"I guess we're going to find out just how safe this cabin is," Drake noted aloud. He kept his glowing eyes on the beast. It was nearly to the porch. "It has yellow eyes. It's a level 1."

Drake, using his magical vision, looked in all directions surrounding the cabin. There was no sign of any other threats. "Unless you want to go out and fight it, I won't stop you. I think we should leave it alone and fight it in the morning if it's still here."

Chad looked over at Mike. "I'm too exhausted to fight it. Drake nearly died. I don't think it's wise for you to fight it when you have non-reliable backup."

Mike smiled. "You both are right. Besides, we need to see how secure this cabin really is. If it's still here in the morning, we'll fight it."

With the three in agreement, Chad hung the bells on the front door and headed back to the bedroom. He was still hungry, and he had a bowl of stew waiting for him. Drake and Mike followed close behind him. They were hungry, too.

Drake sat on his bed. He had his stew in his hand. In front of him was the dimension map was open, spread out on the bed.

"We're here," Drake pointed at the three dots on the map. One dot was green, while the other two were glowing white. The tree dots showed that they were in the same spot.

There was also a yellow dot with them. "I'm guessing the yellow dot is the beast outside?" Mike asked.

Drake nodded, then slid his finger along the dirt road that they had been traveling on. "That looks like the halfway point. The map refers to it as the broken bridge. I have to assume that it's literally a broken bridge." He pointed to a clearing right before it. "We should aim for the bridge. If we can get past it, then we can keep going. If we can't, then we can stay in this clearing."

The boys studied the map. Draco Town was near a clearing. In the clearing was a green shimmering oval. "I think that's where we entered the dimension," Chad put in, pointing to the shimmering oval. There are two towns. One of them is Chadwick, and the other is Storm Town. Do you think we should stay in one of the towns?"

Drake shook his head. "We put Draco Town in danger. I don't want to put anyone else in danger by just being there. If we have to go, then we will. Otherwise, we stick to clearings." Sighing, Drake continued. "Unlike Draco Town, the other two are pretty far from the road. There are more towns, but they're going the opposite direction from Draco."

Mike suddenly grinned. "See all the dots...We can see where all the beasts in the area are located. We can avoid the higher level until we're strong enough to defeat them."

"It looks like level four beasts are blue, and the level five is purple. I wonder if that's the color their eyes glow?" Chad pondered, staring at the clusters of different colored dots. All the towns had clusters of glowing white dots, except for the gargoyle's lair, which had a cluster of grey dots.

Looking between his friends, Drake rolled up the map and stored it inside his cuff. "So, we all agree?" he asked. "We try to get to the broken bridge?"

"We stay in the clearing just before the broken bridge if we can't cross it and get to the next clearing," Mike confirmed.

Chad just nodded, standing up and collecting the bowls, then disappeared from the room.

"We're in level 2 territory. I'm surprised there's a level one beast here. We can deal with it when we wake up if it's still there. Level 2 beasts are still hard, but we need to fight them. Anything higher, we need to be extra careful or avoid them altogether," Drake said, unconsciously rubbing his abdomen where the last one had gutted him.

"Agreed," Mike nodded.

Chad was walking into the room; all he did was nod to show he agreed.

The trio slept well. None of the shutters had been tampered with. The bells remained silent throughout the night. On the front port lay the level 1 wolf beast, sleeping peacefully as if he were there to guard the boys inside.

## **Chapter 40: 40: Renn**

It was the morning, and Drake was the first one awake. Chad and Mike were fast asleep, snoring softly. He had gotten up early. It was barely starting to get light out. The sky was turning red as the twin suns rose up into the sky. He was trying to be as quiet as possible, not wanting to wake up his friends as he was moving around, trying to prepare for his day in silence.

Exiting the room, he remembered the level 1 beast. He pulled out the map to see if the beast was still there. To his surprise, it was. Along with the two white dots and his own green one, there was a yellow indicating it was a level 1 beast. He thought that it would have given up and left. He worried that they would be stuck inside the cabin all day. That would put a real damper on their quest. They needed to finish it, and things kept getting in the way.

Drake pulled his whip out and carefully removed the bells from the door, trying to prevent them from ringing. The slightest movement could alert the beast. Gently laying them in the basket by the door, he slid the lock.

The room was silent, the only thing Drake heard was the sound of his own breath and the soft snoring coming from the other room. When he opened the door of the cabin, he peered out the crack. He had only opened it an inch to see the front porch.

To his surprise, the beast was lying like a house dog on the porch. His yellow eyes were open, appearing to scan the area for threats. Drake didn't know if that's what the wolf beast was doing, but that's what it looked like to him. The beast was watching the trees with narrowed yellow eyes.

Slipping outside, Drake closed the door behind him, not wanting his friends to wake up and startle the beast. As soon as the door closed, the wolf beast looked up. He watched Drake for a second, then put his head down, resting it on his front legs, ignoring him.

'Okay...' Drake thought, confused. The beast didn't even flinch. It didn't attack either; it just lay there looking into the trees.

Drake let his eyes glow a bright emerald green, then looked in the direction the wolf beast was looking. He didn't see anything.

When he looked down at the wolf beast, the beast looked at him. His rat-like tail wagged back and forth like a happy puppy. As Drake dimmed his glowing eyes, the tail slowed.



When he let his eyes glow brighter, the tail wagged faster. "I guess I'd better keep them glowing, huh?" he told the wolf beast.

The beast's ears perked up. It was clearly listening. "Maybe I should keep you as a pet. Would you like that?"

The beast's rat tail wagged faster, and the ears perked up. It stood up and padded toward him, making Drake flinch. The beast seemed to notice because it stopped immediately and lowered back down on its paws. Only its eyes looked up, giving him sad puppy dog eyes.

Drake stared at the beast who was staring at him. It was a stare down, each deciding what to do.

It was the beast that acted first. Staying low, it inched forward, then lay back down. Drake stared down at it in shock. The beast wasn't attacking or being aggressive in any way. It was acting like an ordinary dog trying to gain the trust of someone.

"How about I name you..."

The wolf got excited again, starting to stand up, but decided against it. Its rat tail wagged faster. The wolf beast seemed to like the idea of gaining a name.

Drake thought about it for a moment, then decided on the right one. "How about Renn. I'll call you Renn."

The beast was too excited when it received the name. It stepped forward, nuzzling its massive head on Drake's shoulder. Somehow Drake could tell the beast wasn't trying to hurt him. He reached up and scratched the beast's large head. It was a reflex when petting affectionate dogs. The streaks of yellow fur fluttered with the touch and began to glow; the color changed to green.

**{Congratulations, you have been imprinted with a level 1 wolf beast. She has become your familiar}**

**{You have gained a new member of your cohort. Renn}**

**{Your cohort grows stronger}**

**{As your wolf familiar, Renn will protect all members of your cohort}**

Drake grinned. His cohort had just received a boon. He looked down at the massive beast and rubbed the top of its head. "Keep watch, and I'll bring you some water and food." He told Renn.

Renn immediately went to the edge of the porch and watched near the forest for any sign of a threat.

Drake went inside the cabin and found the largest container he could find. It was a five-gallon bucket for hauling water.

After filling the bucket and going through his food stash, he pulled out a slab of dried meat and took it outside for Renn. Renn drank the water greedily. She was thirsty. He gave her the meat, which she immediately lay down and began to chew on the large slab, still keeping watch of the forest.

"I need to go back in; you keep watch. I need to inform my friends about you," he told Renn.

Renn made a weird barking sound that was between a bark and a howl, then went back to her meat.

Going back into the cabin, Drake cooked his friends something to eat for breakfast. Just as he set the food on the table, Chad and Mike came out of the room.

"You cooked?" Mike asked. There was a wide smile on his face.

Before Chad could say anything, Drake cut in. "I need to talk to you. There have been some new developments, and I don't want you two to freak out on me. Both of you, sit, eat, and I will explain what happened."

Mike and Chad exchanged a look. "Is the beast still here? Do we need to deal with it?" Chad asked.

"No one touches the beast. In fact, it's about the beast that I need to discuss with you."

Mike and Chad exchanged another look and sat down slowly. Drake had finished filling their plates and took a bite himself before starting.

"Do you want the short version or the long version?" Drake asked.

"Short..." they said in unison.

"Short version is... The beast is now a part of our cohort, and what she kills we all gain from it. She will protect all members of the cohort...and her name is Renn." Drake said, smiling. "That's the short version. Even my system declared her to be part of our cohort."

Chad stiffened. "She's a level 1 beast. How are we going to tell her apart from the others? We've only encountered wolf beasts."

Drake's smile widened. "I imprinted with her. She is my familiar, so everything that was yellow on her turned green; Emerald green to be exact. As you saw on the map, there is no green colored wolf beast. It will be easy to tell her apart from the others."

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"You've got to be kidding me!" The blond archer shouted in disbelief as he watched the computer screen. The three boys were walking down the road toward Dragon Head Mountain. There was a wolf beast with emerald green patches mixed in with its pitch-black fur.

The Dimension Master heard his friend. "What's wrong?" he asked, tensing up. The last time there was an issue, Drake nearly died. He had just walked into the room with a tray of coffee for his friends. One of his friends was in the hall bathroom, taking a shower. He refused to go home, not wanting to miss what was happening on the screen.

"See for yourself. I don't even have anything to say about it, but I haven't seen anything like it before. Nor have I heard of anything like that before." The blond stated, confused.

The Dimension Master looked at the screen, dropping the cups of coffee he had held on the tray as he took in what he was seeing. "It can't be," he whispered. His face turned pale as he watched Drake stroke the head of the giant beast.

The blond looked up at the Dimension Master. "Is that bad? He has a beast with him, isn't that a good thing? I mean, it's green, so it's obviously Drake's. It can protect him, right?" Then he paused, "Has that ever happened before. He seems to have tamed it or it imprinted like some dogs do."

The Dimension Master fell heavily in his chair. "It's his familiar and now part of his cohort," he started. "There is a prophecy about a Dimension Master that will one day have a legion of beasts. The prophecy states that he will either destroy the dimension or save it. If things keep happening to him, he's going to hate the dimension to the point of its destruction. Our duty is to protect it." He turned to his friend. "He may be the one who destroys it."