

## **Dimension Master**

### **#Chapter 81: Tavern - Read Dimension Master Chapter 81: Tavern**

#### **Chapter 81: 81: Tavern**

Drake led the way through the main street of Draco Town. He realized that everyone was still in the tavern. There was no one there to know they had even arrived. The dirt streets were empty, and all the shops were closed. Even the inn had a sign on the door alerting everyone that it was closed.

Drake walked down the street with his cohort following behind him. He still held Nelly in his arms, with Renn trying to comfort her. She was still in her rat form as she nuzzled Nelly, who clutched her new doll, her grip getting tighter as they moved deeper into town. Drake could tell that she was getting scared. It was far more than she was before.

When he arrived at the tavern, he went straight to a window and peered in. "Nelly, do you see any of the ones that took you?" he asked her gently. She needed to tell him so he had something to go by. Somewhere to start.

She looked through the window, her sucking became rapid. Tears began to run down her puffy cheeks in long, constant streaks. She nodded her head. She pointed at three of the men inside. "Was there more than those three? Is there anyone else missing who isn't here?" he was baffled that one of the men in the tavern was not one of the men she had pointed to.

Nelly shook her head as she sucked her thumb fiercely.

Drake gave Renn a silent command. Once they entered, she was to guard the door so no one could escape. She immediately jumped off his shoulder, transforming back into her normal wolf-beast form. With Chad and Mike on either side of him, they each pulled a door open, so Drake could step in, with Renn following closely behind him.

Once inside, Mike and Chad closed the door and stood beside the oversized double doors. Renn was directly in front of the doors, preventing anyone from trying to run out of the tavern.

All eyes turned to see who had entered. There were gasps of shock, claps of joy, and some even gulped loud enough for Drake to hear. The patron's emotions were a mixed bag.

Mayor Ivan was at the long table, with the map still spread out in front of him. His soldiers were standing beside him, surveying the map. He had looked up with shock

and relief, not expecting them to return so soon, much less with Nelly with them. Seeing the young girl alive and well produced a sigh of relief from him. He wasn't the only one.

Before anyone could move, Drake, with his eyes glowing with a fierce green light, cleared his throat. "I need everyone in town to be in the tavern NOW!" He scanned the tavern at all the faces looking in shock and worry at his command. "I don't care how old or young they are. Everyone needs to be here. NOW!"

The silence that followed was deafening. They weren't expecting the anger that Drake showed. Nor the command. Mayor Ivan immediately came forward, pulling his roster from the table, bringing it with him. "I think everyone is already here." He already had a feeling of what Drake was about to do, so he didn't fight it. He wanted him to do what he needed to so he could finish the quest. He didn't want the boy to die. He knew what would happen if Drake and his friends didn't finish the quest in time.

Drake looked around the tavern, trying to remember faces. He immediately found that there were a couple of people who he already knew were missing. "Where are Nana and Tod? I don't see them. Check your roster against everyone. Don't trust that someone calling out that they're here after reading off names, because it's easy for someone to call out in their place. Do it now." Drake's tone was hard. Many of the people in the room were white as a sheet. Most flinched. When a dimension master was angry, entire towns could be decimated.

Drake wasn't here for that. He was there to find everyone who was involved with Nelly's kidnapping. Just because Nelly only knew who three of them were didn't mean there weren't more. "I'll go myself," Mayor Ivan stated, handing the roster to Drake. Drake took it, scanning the room, avoiding keeping his gaze on anyone in particular. He didn't want to let any of them know he already knew of those three men who were involved.

Ivan left the tavern in a rush to look for anyone who hadn't been in the tavern. With everything going on, he hadn't realized that others weren't there. Drake waited, watching those inside. He watched their features, their reaction, even their movements.

It only took Ivan about ten minutes to find any stragglers, those not in the tavern. When he returned, he had a dozen others with him.

Drake handed the roster back. "Make sure everyone is accounted for. Everyone!" He didn't even look at Ivan when he spoke; he was still scanning the reactions of the people in front of him.

Ivan took the roster, looking from each name to the person in the tavern that it corresponded to. When he was done, everyone was present. He nodded, then handed the roster back to Drake.

Drake tapped his staff on the ground. A green glow erupted, forming a soft green light that blocked the windows and doors leading out of the main room and its other rooms,

leaving only the main door free, which Mike, Chad, and Renn were successfully blocking. He didn't know he could do that. He had done it out of instinct. He had to hold back the shock and surprise of what he had just done. It would be a handy skill in the future if they could survive their quest.

Nana looked over at Nelly; tears of relief were in her eyes. As if out of instinct, neither she nor Tod came forward to greet her. They could tell that something was about to happen, and Drake wouldn't let anyone near her until he did whatever he came here to do.

Drake paid attention to his gut. It was aching. He could tell there was still something wrong. He wouldn't hand Nelly over until that feeling vanished.

Drake looked around the room. "When I call your name, you will come forward. I will either ask you to leave the tavern or have you sit at the table behind me. There are several of you I need to speak with when I'm done. I'm short on time and need to find you quickly," he told them. He tried to be vague, not wanting them to know that those who were guilty would be the ones staying inside. His goal was to separate them, letting those leave who were innocent to keep them safe from whatever happened once those who were guilty were discovered.

He looked around the room, noting sudden fear in some. Gavin remained silent, drinking from his usual stein. He had a smug look on his face, but Drake paid no special attention to him.

Mike came forward and stood next to Drake. He wanted to help protect Nelly if someone decided to lash out. Drake would be too busy interrogating everyone.

Drake handed Nelly over to Mike. He refused to allow anyone else to touch her. Not until he got to the bottom of things. Renn and Chad stayed ready. They had to protect the door from those trying to escape and help protect Nelly if someone tried to stop the interrogations.

Drake read the first name on the town roster. It was Mayor Ivan himself. As mayor, he was always the first one on the list.

Ivan stood nervously in front of Drake. Drake nodded. "I have some questions that I need you to answer me honestly. First, did you have anything to do with Nelly disappearing?"

Ivan shook his head. "No. I had nothing to do with her disappearance."

The system remained silent. "Do you know who took her?" Drake questioned.

Ivan shook his head again. "No, I don't know anything. I don't know who took her or why."

The system remained silent. "You can leave if you want. If you don't, you may sit there," Drake said, pointing to a table near the one he had originally indicated. He wanted to separate the innocent from the guilty. Ivan was innocent, so he was put at a table close to him.

Mayor Ivan had decided to stay, sitting nervously at the table he was told to sit at. He intently watched what was going on. He had been right; he was finding the culprits of those involved with Nelly's kidnapping, allowing him to deal with them. Ivan was one of the few who knew that the dimension master had the lie-detecting skill. He could tell that Drake was using it now.

Drake called the next name on the list. It was a woman he had never met. He had seen her at the celebration, but didn't meet her face-to-face. Her name was Lily. When he asked all his questions, the system remained silent. She was also telling the truth. He pointed to the door, not giving her an option to stay. You may leave.

She merely nodded, then rushed out of the tavern, disappearing as the door shut behind her.

He had called several more people up, going down the list of names in the order they were listed on the town roster, with the same results. There wasn't anyone who was asked to stay. Of course, none of them were the three that Nelly had pointed to when they had arrived and looked through the window for Nelly to see. He told Mayor Ivan that he could stay, mainly because he was the mayor and had a right to know what was going on. The only other ones he would let stay were Nana and Tod, because they were Nelly's family.

He read the next name on the list. It was a man, and his name was Jor.

## **Chapter 82: 82: Interrogations**

Jor stepped forward. It turned out he was one of the men that Nelly had pointed to. He didn't look bothered, not knowing that Drake's system would tell him who was lying and who wasn't. His arrogant confidence radiated around him as he stood in front of Drake.

"Do you know who took Nelly?" Drake questioned, maintaining eye contact with the arrogant man.

The man shook his head. "No."

**{A lie has been detected.}**

"Did you have anything to do with Nelly's kidnapping?" Drake continued, not revealing that he already knew that the man was lying. He remained calm, acting as though there was no sign that something was wrong.

"I don't know who took her or why," he stated, a smug smirk on his face.

**{A lie has been detected}**

Drake nodded. "Please sit at the table. I need to speak with you later."

The man paused for a second before complying. He wasn't expecting to be asked to stay.

Drake called a few more people listed on the town roster. Some of them were Nana and Tod. He asked them the same question. They didn't know either. Nor were they lying. So far, the only one was Jor.

Drake smiled, looking at Nana, then down at Tod. "If you want to leave, you can. Nelly stays with me until I'm done. You can sit with Mayor Ivan if you want." He offered. He didn't want to separate Nana from Nelly. It wouldn't be right.

Nana took Tod over to the table where Mayor Ivan was sitting. Drake took the wooden toy resembling Renn out and handed it to Tod. "Someone I met back home made this and says to say hi. His name is Bren."

Nana gasped, tears welling up in her eyes. "He's...he's alive?" she asked. Her voice was trembling.

Drake studied her for a moment. "Is that good?"

Nana nodded. Her hand went to her lips as she tried her best not to cry.

"I need to finish. I won't have time to tell you very much; I have to leave right after I'm finished. I'll tell you when I come back again."

Nana nodded, tears of joy spilling down her cheeks.

Drake turned and faced the remaining people. The next one to come was a man named Trey. He was also one of the three that Nelly had pointed to. Drake decided to change the order of the questions and add a few more. He already knew this one was guilty.

"Do you know why Nelly was taken?" Drake questioned.

Trey shrugged. "No, why would I know?" he shot back.

**{A lie has been detected}**

"Do you know who was involved with taking Nelly?" Drake continued, not revealing he knew that man was lying.

Trey rolled his eyes. "No, why would I know that?"

**{A lie has been detected.}**

"Do you know how many were involved with taking Nelly?" Drake asked. He needed more information. So, he added more questions to his short list that he was using.

"No. I don't know anything." He growled out. He was clearly getting annoyed, wanting the questions to stop.

**{A lie has been detected}**

Drake smiled. "Sit over with Jor, please. I need to talk to you after." He did not indicate that he knew Trey was lying.

Drake was scanning the remainder of the room. He hadn't gotten to Gavin yet. Nor the third man that Nelly had pointed out. He went through his list, going from one name to another. Everyone seemed to be telling the truth. The Tavern was emptying quickly. There were only a handful left.

Drake called the next name. This time it was Gavin. Although his nickname was Billy, he couldn't seem to call him by it. It felt somehow wrong.

Gavin stood smugly in front of Drake, waiting to be questioned. Drake stared back for only a second. The gleam in his eye from before was still there.

"Do you know why Nelly was taken?" Drake asked.

"Yes. I believe she was taken to stall you from doing your quest. It's timed, isn't it?" Gavin asked, smiling.

The system remained silent.

"So you know where she was being taken?" Drake continued, studying Gavin.

"To the ocean. They were taking her to Treasure Island to be sold," Gavin said, smiling wider.

The system remained silent.

"Did you have anything to do with her being taken?" Drake was staring at Gavin with intensity. He was openly answering his questions. It was something he didn't suspect.

"No. I only know because I investigated it after she was taken," he explained, still smiling.

The system remained silent.

"Do you know how many were involved?" Drake asked, needing that information too.

Gavin smiled widely. "I know three names. I know there were groups on the road to stall, although I don't know who. I know there was a crew from a ship that she was given to that was heading to the beach. They were supposed to wait for their ship to arrive to pick her up." He explained smugly.

The system remained silent.

Drake turned to his friends, giving a meaningful look. They nodded. Mike handed Nelly to Nana, then stood protectively in front of them, keeping the table with Jor and Trey separated from Nelly.

Drake looked at Gavin. "Any chance you want to tell me who they are?"

Gavin chuckled. "I can tell you, but I want to see if you can pick them out yourself first. So far, you're doing rather well."

The system remained silent.

Drake sighed. "Have a seat with Mayor Ivan."

He called the rest up, of those left in the tavern, one after the other. The last of the three men finally made his way up to Drake. His name was Victor. His arms were folded across his chest. There was an evil gleam in his eye that made Renn stiffen up, ready to defend her master.

Drake smiled widely. "Aw... I don't even have to ask you anything. Your demeanor said it all. Tell me... why did you, Jor, and Trey kidnap Nelly?" he asked, not bothering with the formalities.

Gasps came from those left in the Tavern.

"I didn't do anything!" Victor yelled. He was more pissed that Drake figured it out.

**{A lie has been detected}**

Drake smiled wider. "Let me tell you a little about myself. I have a very unique skill that allows me to detect when someone is lying. All dimension masters have it. I'm only an heir, but I still have it. The moment you lie, I know. You and your two friends have lied to me."

The moment Drake informed him that he and his friends were lying, the man lashed out, pulling a knife from his belt and swiping it toward Drake. Drake didn't hesitate. He

stepped back, slamming his staff. A green pulse was sent to all three of his suspects, encasing them in a cocoon of soft green energy. They were bound, unable to get free.

"Mayor Ivan, I suggest you lock these guys up," he said calmly. "I still need to ask everyone else. I don't believe there was anyone else involved, but I'd like to make sure."

Ivan nodded, getting up to find some of his soldiers who had already been interrogated. By the time he was back, Drake had finished with the rest of those in the room. He was right. There was no one else involved.

Drake had to release the prisoners from the energy cocoon so that the soldiers could take them. Victor was the first to respond, diving in with a dagger he had hidden on his person. Drake lifted his palm, shooting a plasma ball. It exploded in his face, killing him on the spot.

**{You have killed a Level 1 kidnapper 1/3}**

The other two men backed away. Drake's message confirmed that there were only three. He sighed, seeing that he would need to kill the other two as well.

One rushed toward the front double doors of the tavern. He had a knife in his hand. He tried to stab Chad while attempting to escape. With ease, Chad sliced through the man's chest with his sword, killing him.

**{A member of your cohort has killed a level 1 kidnapper 2/3}**

Drake saw that no rewards were given. This wasn't the first time. He figured there would be one after the main quest to save Nelly was complete.

Panicking, the third man pulled out an ax, swinging it toward Mike, who was the closest. Mike caught it with his gauntlets, pulling it from his hand, then killing the man with the man's own ax.

**{A member of your cohort has killed a level 1 kidnapper 3/3}**

**{Quest Complete: Save Nelly}**

**{Quest reward: Timed Quest/Find the chamber of knowledge/obtain the Master Spell book has been reset}**

**{5:00:00:00 time remaining.}**

Drake shook his head. The gut feeling he was having vanished. There was no longer anything wrong. He turned to Nana. "We have to go. We have a timed quest to complete. I'll tell you about Bren when we get back."

Nana nodded, smiling through her tears. "Thank you."

### **Chapter 83: 83: Hive Plan**

Drake turned to Gavin. "I need to talk to you when we get back. Our quest is timed, and we're running out of it. We need to leave right now, so I don't have the time."

Gavin shrugged, but said nothing. The hidden gleam in his eyes was still there. Drake wanted to know what it meant, but had too little time to investigate it.

Drake stood in the center of the room with his staff in his grip. Mike and Chad came closer, surrounding Drake, ready to be taken back to the cabin. Renn, in her rat form, jumped up on Drake's shoulder, holding on with her tiny claws. She knew that she didn't fit in the cabin in her wolf form, so she changed into her rat form. Drake, with one last scan of the tavern, slammed the staff into the floor. A blinding green light flashed. When it disappeared, they were gone from the tavern and back in the cabin. Since the time reset, teleporting them back to the cabin cut off a large amount of time.

The first thing Drake did was look at his timer. He wanted to be sure of how much time they had left, thankful that it had been reset for them.

#### **{Timed Quest: 04:23:49:17 remaining}**

Smiling at the time, Drake moved his attention to communicate with Ruby. She reported that the men surrounding the cabin hadn't moved. Nor did they suspect that they had even left and that Nelly had been taken back home. Their plan had worked perfectly. Drake thanked his familiar before turning his attention back to his cohort, inside the cabin.

Drake was relieved that he didn't have to worry about Nelly anymore. They could do what they needed to do while they escaped the cabin and finished their quest. She was no longer a distraction for them and could no longer be used against him during his current ascension quest.

After activating his quest map, Drake studied the green quest line on the map and where it led. He was pleased at what he saw. The quest hadn't changed. Nor did the location. They were in the clearing where they needed to be. They needed to find the Chamber of Knowledge, find the book, and return to Draco Town. He could only hope that nothing else tried to stop them before they completed their quest.

Drake had a feeling that where the green line on the map had ended in the clearing, it would continue in either a tunnel or a cave system. He wasn't sure. It couldn't be so easy as to only get to where it stopped in the clearing and be done with it. There had to be more to it than that.

They still had a major problem. Their cabin was still surrounded, blocking them from going the short distance to where they needed to be. Essentially, they were back where they started. They just had more time to figure it out. They didn't want to waste it, though. They had no idea where the green line would lead once they reached the spot in the clearing where it ended.

Drake sat on the sofa, thinking about how to proceed. He had an idea, but he knew it would be difficult. He figured he'd explain it and see what his friends thought about his idea.

"I think we should just leave the cabin, store it, and proceed. If they stand in our way, we can just blast them to the side with energy and keep walking."

"At least we don't have to worry anymore about Nelly getting hurt. We can do that. Keep in mind that we can't kill them unless they attack us first. Standing in our way is NOT attacking," Mike reminded them.

Chad nodded in agreement, but didn't respond. He was thinking of scenarios in his mind and what to do about them.

Drake communicated with Ruby, letting her know what he was planning to do. He gave her the option to follow them if she wanted to, but added that she needed to be careful, telling her that he didn't want her to get hurt. There were a lot of men surrounding the cabin, and he didn't want her or her hive to get hurt.

Preparing the cabin from the inside, they grabbed what they needed. With Renn in her rat form on his shoulder, he walked casually out of the cabin with his cohort behind him. Once outside, Renn immediately leaped off Drake's shoulder and transformed into her beast form, and surveyed the area.

All the men surrounding their cabin watched, preparing themselves to stop them from continuing on their quest. Drake could see them tensing and pulling out their weapons, ready to fight.

Ignoring the men, Drake immediately stored the cabin, then began following the quest thread. It was a bright green line, glistening, unseen by all but Drake and his cohort.

As they began to walk, Ruby flashed Drake an image, one that was an idea she was willing to do, to get them past the men. Drake agreed, but told her and her hive to be careful. He didn't want them hurt on his account.

As soon as the image faded, Drake and his cohort had already taken several steps, and the men slowly closed in, trying to prevent them from going any further.

Drake smiled, then shrugged nonchalantly. "I'm not helping you survive," he said casually. "This clearing is surrounded by hundreds, if not thousands, of scorpion beasts. I'm not staying to get involved. If they kill and eat you, that's all on you."

Just as Drake finished his words, all around the clearing, in the tree line, clicking sounds vibrated, then the high-pitched shrieks of the hive echoed all around them. By sheer number of beasts, the echo of their cries vibrated the clearing, making the ground rumble. It was clear to the men that Drake wasn't bluffing.

Panic washed through the men's camp as the clatter of weapons being brandished could be heard. Drake smiled and continued following the line, ignoring their panic.

"You're not going to save us!" one man shouted in panic. Afraid of the horde of beasts.

Drake shrugged as his friends watched the conversation calmly, saying nothing. "First off, you're the ones who are trying to keep me in one place. The only thing that's kept you alive is the fact that you haven't attacked us. Second, the beasts are mine. If you attack them, I can kill all of you. Third, they may all have green eyes, but only one of them is bound to me. The rest are allies. You harm an ally of mine, and it's game over for all of you. Next, all but one can kill you no matter what you do, and it won't affect me. Think about that for a moment before you do anything to them. They will only attack you if you try to keep me and my cohort here."

The man who spoke gulped, fear washing over them. Their own lives were in their hands. What they did now would determine whether they would live or die. As he thought, the sound of clicking and high-pitched shrieking grew louder, then the hive of scorpions emerged from the trees. It was all the way around them.

The men looked around them, their weapons raised. As they stared at the masses of scorpion beasts, fear seeped into their pores. There were scorpions as far as their eyes could see. All of them had eyes that were glowing a bright green.

One of the scorpion beasts broke away from their formation and headed toward Drake. It was Ruby; she wanted to go with them on their quest. Drake didn't want her to have to leave her hive if she didn't want to. She had indicated that she would still be connected to the hive and wanted to go with him so that she could protect her master.

Ruby, with a quick burst of her natural speed, reached them in seconds. She clicked and shrieked at the men as she passed. Drake had spoken loud enough that all the men could hear. They all knew the situation.

Ruby stopped at Drake and lowered her head. Drake stroked the smooth shell, then smiled, looking at the men in question. He raised one brow slightly. It was a challenge.

After a few more minutes of thought, the men stepped aside, letting Drake and his cohort pass. Renn and Ruby followed as the rest of the hive contained the men in the

camp, allowing Drake to continue on his quest. The tables had turned, and the men did not like it.

Drake turned to the men and spoke loud and clear. "Remember from this day forward that all beasts with green eyes are either my familiars or my allies. Harming them will be attacking me. It's best if you remember that... oh... they will let you leave in a while. Don't agitate them, it won't be good for your health," he advised smugly, then continued following the glowing green quest thread with his cohort beside him.

## **Chapter 84: 84: Empty Room**

Drake and his cohort followed the green thread the short distance in the clearing to where it stopped. It took them to what looked like a beast's lair. It was a large dirt hole in the ground that they were barely able to fit inside. Ruby was too large to fit through it at all. So was Renn, who transformed into her rat form and headed a few feet into the dark depths of the tunnel, then waited for Drake and the rest of the cohort to follow.

"Are you able to transform into something smaller?" Drake asked his scorpion beast. He didn't want to assume that she could, when she couldn't, or vice versa. He knew that Renn was able to, but only because she had visited the ordinary world.

Ruby shook her head, indicating she couldn't change forms, making Drake sigh. He caressed her large head. "If I take you home to my world, you will be able to change into something smaller when we get there. After we return here, you will still be able to change into it if you choose to do so. We only stay in that world long enough to gather supplies. I won't force you to go with us, but if you want the ability to change forms, then when we finish our quest, I'll contact you so I can take you with me if that's what you want. You can let me know when we finish, if you want to go back with us so you can gain the ability to change forms... ok."

Ruby bowed low. A feeling of relief washed through their mind-link before she turned and headed toward her hive, where she could keep Drake updated on what was going on. Her speed was so fast that she disappeared only seconds after she left. Drake didn't know if it was relief to go back with him, or relief not to go... he had no idea why Ruby felt so relieved. Drake shrugged, then looked at his friends. "We'll contact her when we get the master spell book. Let's go."

With Renn in her rat form, in the lead, they followed the green thread into the depths of the dark dirt tunnel. Their eyes glowed brightly, allowing them to see perfectly in the darkness.

The tunnel was smooth and long, as if a giant worm had slithered into the ground, making its path too large for the dirt to fall back into place, refilling the hole.

The damp, earthy smell permeated the air. It smelled fresh and clean as if nothing had ever contaminated it. There were no other tunnels, just the long one they were in, which

felt never-ending. The walls were smooth, with no crevasses, indents, or holes anywhere. The only thing that lit the way was the little lantern of truth that hung on Drake's belt and their own glowing eyes as they scanned the tunnel for things that only their magical vision could see. They continued to follow the brightly glowing green thread as it led them through the dark depths of the tunnel system.

After some time, there was finally a fork in front of them. There were four paths to take. The green thread led them through the third one. This one was just as long. Drake was glad he had the thread leading him. He would have never figured out which tunnel to take. He would have started with the first one and worked his way to the last one until he found the one that he needed. He felt like he would have wasted a lot of time without the thread leading the way.

After walking through the third tunnel for what seemed like hours, it split yet again, this time into three tunnels. The thread led through the last one. "In case we get lost, remember the third tunnel, then the third tunnel again. You never know if the green thread will disappear or not," Drake mumbled, scanning the walls of the tunnel as they walked.

So far, the tunnel remained smooth with no indentations or chambers attached. The tunnel was firm, with packed dirt pressed tightly, which made it stable. At least Drake hoped that it was stable. He was afraid to make noise that might cause a collapse in the tunnel, trapping them.

"I sure hope this thing doesn't decide to collapse on us," Chad muttered, as if he had read Drake's thoughts, not liking the tunnel. Unlike the cave that was made of rock, this one was made entirely of packed dirt, which is far more likely to collapse than rock.

"Let's not take chances and keep our voices to a whisper. I don't want vibrations to collapse any part of it," Drake whispered. "That would really suck."

Mike stayed silent, taking a page out of Chad's playbook, who was the one who kept quiet most of the time, while he, himself, spoke frequently, having trouble keeping his mouth shut. The fear of the tunnel collapsing far outweighed his need to talk.

As they followed the green thread through the tunnel, it led to a large chamber. Inside, in the center of the chamber, stood a pillar that looked like a podium. The rest of the chamber was smooth dirt, with nothing else to be seen. The packed dirt podium was flat on the top and had nothing sitting on its smooth surface.

"Is this the chamber of knowledge?" Mike whispered, afraid to speak too loudly, causing the ceiling of the chamber to collapse.

Drake looked at the full map in his system and found that it was. They had found what they were looking for; they found the Chamber of Knowledge, but the podium didn't have the book they needed sitting on top of it. The room was empty.

Drake looked around the chamber, looking for a way to access the book. When they had received the staff, they all were required to stand on the platform as a group, and the staff rose from the ground for them as a result. This one didn't seem to have anything that could do that. From what Drake could tell, it was just a short pillar of packed dirt: nothing else.

"Look around for something that could tell us what we need to do," Drake said quietly. His gaze scanned every inch of the tunnel's large chamber. He had his eyes glowing brightly as he looked around him.

The entire chamber was smooth, with no holes or ledges of any kind. The pillar remained where it was. It was made from the same soil that the tunnel had been dug out of. They could see nothing special about it. It appeared to be just a pillar of dirt.

"So much for being easy," Mike muttered sarcastically. "We have just under five days to figure out how to access the book. What do you want to do? Do you want to search the other tunnels to see if there is something in them that we need?"

Drake continued to scan the room as he thought about it. "This is the Chamber of Knowledge. I think we have to use our own knowledge to access the book." It was the only thing he could think of; it made sense. He wasn't sure what to do beyond that.

"Ok..." Chad started. "The last time we all needed to stand on the platform. This one is a podium, and there is no platform for us to stand on. Maybe we all press our hands to it?" he suggested.

They all stepped forward, surrounding themselves with the dirt podium, and placed their hands on the podium's flat surface, then waited. Then waited some more... nothing happened.

Drake stepped away and began to pace as he thought of another way.

"Maybe we should go back to the first fork, and each of us take a tunnel and see if we can find a clue," Mike suggested. "There are four tunnels, and there are four of us."

Drake shrugged. They had plenty of time to explore, so he agreed. Following the thread out of the chamber, they made their way back to the small opening where they had found the four tunnels lined up and the main tunnel that led outside. They stood in front of the four lined up and waited while Drake decided exactly what to do.

After several minutes, Drake looked between his friends. "This is a cohort quest. It's our ascension quest, not just mine. I can feel it in my gut, and it tells me that we need to go into each tunnel as a group. We'll start with the first one, and when we find out if there is anything that can help us, we'll move on if we need to."

Drake and Chad exchanged a look before nodding. "Agreed," they said quietly in unison. They still didn't want the vibration of their voice to collapse the tunnel. It would be deadly. All their talk remained in a whisper.

## **Chapter 85: 85: Four Prong Fork/Tunnel 1**

Drake led the way as they stepped into the first tunnel of the four-prong fork of tunnels in front of them. Behind them was a tunnel that would lead them outside the tunnel and back into the clearing.

As one, Drake and his cohort stepped into the first tunnel. They walked through the tunnel, scanning every inch of it, looking for anything hidden within the dirt.

Like the others that they had been through so far, the tunnel walls were smooth, with no indentations or openings leading to caverns. There were no holes, cracks, or anything, anywhere. The walls were completely unblemished.

It felt like the tunnel went on forever, making them walk through it for hours. When it finally ended, it had stopped short as if a wall had been placed to block their path. With their eyes glowing brightly, Mike was the only one who seemed to have found something hiding beneath the soil.

"I think I found something," Mike muttered, trying to keep his voice as low as possible. His eyes were fixed on the area as he pointed to the spot where he could see something inside the dirt.

Drake, Chad, and even Renn looked at the spot where Mike had pointed. "I don't see anything," Drake whispered.

Chad nodded in agreement. He didn't see anything either. He didn't say anything, not wanting to make any noise.

Renn sent an image through his mind, telling him that she didn't see anything either.

Mike waved his hand through the packed dirt, causing grains of dirt to fall to the ground. He continued to loosen the dirt in the area until it finally revealed a small key. It glowed faintly with an electric blue light. It was clear that he was the only one who could have seen it. It was the same color as his lightning.

Drake, Chad, and Renn continued to scan the walls with their magical vision, trying to see if they could find something themselves, but they never found anything.

"Keep an eye on our surroundings as we head back to the fork. We might have missed something," Drake whispered. "It might be hidden like Mike's key."

Chad nodded in agreement as Renn squeaked softly, mimicking a real rat. She agreed to look for something as well.

Making their way back toward the fork, they scanned the walls, floor, and ceiling for evidence of more hidden treasure. They didn't find anything. The entire tunnel appeared to be empty.

Halfway to the small chamber where the four tunnels met, a low growl sounded from the shadows in front of them, echoing through the tunnel. They froze in their tracks. There was something in the tunnel with them.

"Shit, if that thing collapses the tunnel, we're dead," Mike hissed quietly. "Renn's too big to transform into her wolf form, which means they can eat her in one bite."

"Try not to hit the walls or make too much noise," Drake quietly advised. He didn't want to collapse the tunnel during a fight. Fighting in the tunnels was not ideal. Too much could happen. Not only was the space too compacted, but there was nowhere to hide or move freely during a fight. Because of the tunnel's darkness, it would be difficult to get a good look at whatever beast was blocking their path, making their fight even more dangerous, making them unable to see them until they were right in front of them, nearly too late.

With their glowing eyes, they looked down the tunnel trying to see whatever beast was in front of them, but could see nothing.

"It must be exactly like the bears by the caves on the dragon mountain. When their eyes are closed, we're blind, even with our magical vision," Drake complained quietly, expressing his concerns. "That makes it even worse."

Drake carefully uncoiled his whip, letting it fall gracefully to the ground. He took the lead, with Mike and Chad flanking him. Renn was on his shoulder, hissing quietly and holding on with her tiny claws. She didn't like having to fight down in the tunnels either.

Drake's eyes glowed brighter as he tried to communicate with whatever beast was blocking their path. He couldn't see anything, but he figured he would at least try. He could gain another ally, or even a familiar, if the beast listened.

It didn't listen, its growls growing closer. The lantern of truth glowed softly, keeping their immediate area lit. The beast in front of them was still in the shadow, not yet close enough for the lantern to reveal it in front of them.

Drake let his whip glow softly as he filled it with green energy, sharpening its bladed tip. Mike and Chad did the same. Mike used the energy of his blade, but did not use the electrical current that normally pulsed up and down the blade. He was afraid the lightning would collapse the cave. He had to rely on the other power of his sword. The glowing white energy pulsed softly as he tightened his grip.

As they walked further, the beast finally came into view. It was a strange form of a worm. However, it had the head of a rodent of some kind. It wasn't that big, but its long, sharp teeth appeared deadly. Drake tried again to speak to the beast, but it wouldn't listen. Its beady eyes glowed with a soft yellow shine. It was a level 1 beast.

"Fine, then die," Drake hissed, sweeping out his whip. It sliced through the worm like paper. It was only a level one, making it easy to kill. It burst into a cloud of light particles that briefly lit several feet of the tunnel, showing a horde waiting in the darkness. It wasn't alone; there were a lot more of them in the shadows, blocking their way. There were dozens of them, and there was no way around them; they had to fight.

**{You have slain a cave worm}**

More growls echoed through the cave. The others scurried closer, ready to attack and attempt to overwhelm them.

Renn tucked herself inside Drake's robes. She was far too small in her current form to do any good against the cave worms. Mike was right, they could easily eat her in one bite.

Drake continued to lash his whip. His cohort was unable to pass him to help. The tunnel was too narrow. One after the other, the cave worms died.

**{You have slain a cave worm}**

**{you have slain a cave worm} ...**

One jumped forward, trying to land its slick body on Drake, but Mike shot his sword forward, impaling it.

**{A member of your cohort has slain a cave worm.}**

The messages kept coming, but Drake ignored them. There were too many cave worms to worry about the messages.

As Drake slashed his whip, one worm made it past him, its sharp jaws biting into Mike's shoulder. Chad came in and sliced it; then he quickly healed his friend. Drake had most of it covered. Not many were getting past him. Those who did had quickly died, either Mike's or Chad's swords slicing through them with ease. There were clouds of light particles, a constant shine of light within the cave, making the entire horde visible.

The mass of rodent worms dwindled rapidly. The clouds of light particles faded until there was nothing left.

Holding up the lantern of truth, another key was discovered. It was orange in color, with a green glow that only glowed in the key's tip. It had been dropped by one of the worms after it had died.

Drake slowly picked up the key, staring silently at it. The thoughts were flowing through his mind. His eyes widened as he realized what he was seeing. He turned to his friends.

"This key is to represent Ruby. I know it is. She's a level 2 beast. That explains why it's orange and green," Drake whispered, slipping the key in his pocket. He looked at Mike. "Yours glows the same color as your lightning. That means the rest of us must have a key that represents us. Renn's should be red with a green tip. Chad, yours should be white, and mine is green." Drake remembered he had a key also. One that he had found during the previous quest. If they didn't find another one, he would use that one in its place and see if it works, even though it was a little bit smaller than the two they had just found.

After studying it, he could tell that it was meant for Ruby, who had no way of fitting into the tunnel. His thought was that the quest must have altered itself to accommodate her since he hadn't had her at the beginning of the quest. He needed to receive a key representing her in some way, so the beast was sent to drop it for them.

They continued until they reached the four-prong fork in the tunnel again. They needed to try the next tunnel. If he had been right in his thinking, either he, Chad, or Renn would find the next one. Mike and Ruby already had theirs; there were only three left.

## **Chapter 86: 86: Tunnel 2**

Standing once again at the four-prong fork in the tunnel, they peered down the second tunnel. Its dark depths were unseen due to the darkness. The small lantern lit only what was directly around them, but nothing else. Due to the cave worms, they kept their weapons out. Ready to fight against more creatures hiding in the tunnel's darkness.

As Drake looked into the dark tunnel, he hoped that they wouldn't come across any more beasts. Although all of the level one beasts were easy to deal with, they were on the clock. They needed to get the quest done as quickly as possible. They had a lot of tunnels to search and not very much time to do it.

Drake pulled up his ascension quest counter that counted down the time continuously to see how long they had left. They had to remember that if they didn't finish in time, they would fail the quest; with failure, only death awaited them. They had to get moving and find everything they needed to activate the podium so that they could obtain the Master spell book. It took a long time to find the Chamber of Knowledge, then hours to reach the end of the first tunnel. He could tell that it was already late. He just didn't know by how much. He was already exhausted, and his stomach grumbled in hunger. He didn't want to stop to eat, though; there wasn't enough time.

**{Timed Quest: 03:38:12:19 remaining}**

"We have just over three days left. It's hard to keep track of time down here," Drake complained quietly. That explained why he was so exhausted and hungry. They had kept moving, not willing to stop as they continued looking for what they needed to complete their quest and gain access to the master spell book.

Because they were underground, they didn't know when the twin suns rose or fell, making it impossible to keep track of time.

A sudden image flashed through Drake's mind. It was Ruby who wanted to give him an update. She was showing him the men who had surrounded the camp. She and her hive had kept them contained, not willing to let them go until the quest was complete. Ruby had indicated that she was afraid they would try to follow them, or go back to town and cause more trouble, before Drake and his cohort completed the quest. She wasn't taking any chances.

Drake smiled, thanking her. She was doing a good job and appreciated the precautions she was taking to make sure they completed their quest and stayed as safe as possible. Even she knew it was timed.

Drake sent her feelings of appreciation, then turned his attention back to the tunnels.

"I think we have to keep moving. We don't have a choice, we just need to look faster," Mike declared in a whisper. He knew that if they cut it short, even by a little, they would die. "We should go as far as we can until we're too tired to continue."

With agreements all around, they headed cautiously down the second tunnel.

"I think either Chad, Renn, or I will find something in this tunnel. If I'm seeing this correctly, then each tunnel represents one of us. I think the beasts we fought earlier came to deliver Ruby's key. She wasn't part of the cohort when we started. It had to get to us somehow. That, and she is too large to fit inside the tunnels."

They all nodded, grunting in agreement as they rushed down the tunnel, looking for anything hiding beneath the soil of the walls, floor, and ceiling. The tunnel was much shorter. Like the other tunnels, there were no holes or other passageways in the tunnel. It was a straight shot, all the way until the tunnel's end.

As they ran, there was no sign of beasts, and nothing unexpected happened. It was completely devoid of life. There was only Drake and his cohort.

When they reached the end of the tunnel, it opened up into a tiny chamber. It was only two feet wider than the tunnel itself. They scanned around them, their eyes glowing brightly using their magical vision, but found nothing.

Renn had leaped off Drake's shoulder and started scanning the floor, running around sniffing and squeaking softly as the others searched the walls and ceiling. When they had finished with their surroundings, the cohort began to look around on the floor, looking for something that might be hiding there. They didn't find anything. That was until Renn started hissing, trying to get their attention. They looked toward the sound of her hiss. She was in the exact center of the tiny chamber, sniffing frantically around in a small spot on the floor.

Drake looked down at her, watching as she circled the small area. When she finally found what she was looking for, she began to scrape at the floor with her little claws. After several minutes, A glowing red key with a green tip could be seen peeking through the dirt as Drake and his cohort watched.

This was confirmation of what Drake had been thinking. Each one of them would need to find a key. That included himself. He could tell that the little key he had received in the last quest was not the one he needed. He needed to find another one as they searched the tunnels.

Once the key Renn found was fully revealed, she took it into her mouth and jumped back onto Drake's shoulder. There were only two more keys to search for: one that would glow white for Chad and one that would glow green for himself.

Drake gently took the key from Renn's mouth and added it to the one he had in his pocket that was Ruby's. Renn couldn't really communicate if she had a key stuck in her mouth. He needed her to be able to warn them if she sensed anything. Not only that, she couldn't defend herself if her mouth was full. She needed her needle-sharp teeth so she could fight back if there was an attack and she needed to defend herself.

They scanned the small chamber a second time to make sure that it was empty, then headed back out toward the entrance where the four-prong fork was. Because of the lack of time and the fact that they didn't need to recheck for keys, they began jogging. Their feet were pounding on the hard dirt as they made their way to the end of the tunnel. It vibrated the tunnel, but only subtly. They were in a hurry; they still had another tunnel to search.

"Do we want to do the last tunnel next? That way, we can go directly to the three-prong fork. We already know that one of the tunnels is the Chamber of Knowledge. All we have to do is go through the other two. We can look in the short tunnel leading up to the chamber, but I think we should leave the tunnel leading to the Chamber of Knowledge for last." Mike suggested.

Drake agreed. The fastest way was exactly what Mike was suggesting. They were short on time, and who knew how long each tunnel was. The first one took nearly a full day. They kept moving, trying to reach the split where the four tunnels were located.

They were lucky that nothing came to stop them. However, as they ran, an eerie feeling came over them, forcing them to slow down and walk. The atmosphere around them thickened, and the feeling of dread followed.

Walking now, they looked around them, with the little lantern held high, trying to see the way. They saw nothing. Drake attached the lantern to his belt and then pulled out his Master staff. He let the large crystal glow to help light the way. They still saw nothing. He decided to keep it lit. He didn't like what he was feeling. By the look on the others' faces, they didn't like it either.

"We need to keep moving," Drake warned them. "I don't like this feeling. Be prepared to fight... just in case."

Chad and Mike nodded, pulling out their swords as they cautiously continued toward their destination. The powerful energy in their swords glowed faintly as they made their way through the tunnel.

They scanned the tunnel with every step they took. Renn hissed in agitation; she felt it too. Drake asked her to send him images if she knew what they were feeling, but there was nothing to show. She didn't know what it was either.

They kept going, cautiously keeping track of their surroundings. Their eyes glowed brightly, watching for danger. There was nothing; only the eerie feeling that something was there and the feeling of dread that followed.

In the end, nothing came at them through the darkness. The eerie feeling remained, never fading, not even a little. It was letting them know that there was something or someone in the tunnel with them.

## **Chapter 87: 87: Tunnel 4**

Finally reaching the entrance of the tunnel, they stood again, facing toward the four tunnels before them, with the entrance tunnel behind them. Their next tunnel was the fourth one, saving the third one for last. The third tunnel was the one that led to the Chamber of Knowledge. To shorten the time it would take to search the tunnels, they would proceed in a way that they would be able to reach the Chamber of Knowledge as quickly as possible, which meant saving the third tunnel for last.

Drake stared at the small chamber they were in, looking at the five tunnels. For some reason, he knew he had to see something in the small chamber. Something about the way it was set up was trying to tell him something. There was a single tunnel that led outside, and then there were four that were lined up in a row. He appeared deep in thought. He had realized something, yet hadn't been able to define it.

Chad stared at him, unease squeezing him like a snake. "What's wrong?" he asked quietly, worried about the way Drake was thinking. It was bad enough with the eerie

feeling consuming them and the added sensation of dread that chilled their bones; now, Drake, the way he was thinking. He was on the verge of breaking into a cold sweat.

Drake looked again at the entrance that would lead them outside the tunnels, then back at the four in front of them. "Doesn't this resemble a hand?" he asked quietly. They had to remain quiet, not wanting the tunnels to collapse.

His friends gave him no answer; they just kept looking at him, waiting for him to answer Chad's question or to go into the tunnel. They didn't answer Drake either.

Drake sighed, then pointed at the positioning of the tunnels.

"Do you think it means something?" Drake asked, looking around them, then at the floor. He hadn't focused on the floor, only the positioning of the tunnels. He knew it meant something, but he just didn't know what it was. When he looked at the floor, he could see it. Beneath the dirt, something was hiding. "Do you see that? Right there in the center of the palm?" he asked quietly, still trying to keep his voice down.

"I don't see anything," Mike complained. He kept his eyes focused on the spot Drake was indicating.

"Me either," Chad whispered. He watched the spot in question intently.

Drake bent down and carefully scraped at the dirt. As he whipped away one thin layer at a time, a green glow pierced through. Drake smiled. He had just found the key that was meant for him.

Once it was completely revealed, he placed it with the other keys. Then toward Chad. "I believe the next one is yours. You're the only one that hasn't found one yet, that means you will find the next one."

Scanning his friends, he was about to speak, then stopped. He just walked toward the fourth tunnel. As they entered, he finally decided to talk about what he was thinking because he understood something, and he needed to get it out. "I was in the palm. Mike was in the first finger. We came from the thumb. Renn was the second finger, and Chad's will be in the tunnel representing the last finger. The book we need is in the tunnel, representing the third finger. But that one splits into three. It has to mean something."

"Maybe Ruby was meant for that tunnel," Mike suggested.

"I don't think so. If that were the case, we would have been attacked there instead. I think the beasts were added because we changed the quest by gaining a new member of the cohort. I think there is something special about the third tunnel," Drake explained. Then turned to Chad. "Don't forget, you're the one who's supposed to find the last key,

so keep searching. The rest of us will continue looking. There might be something else we need to find other than the keys."

The last tunnel wasn't very long either. It was hard to concentrate, though; the eerie feeling the tunnels were giving them remained, and so did the feeling of dread. They kept at it anyway, searching for the last key.

"Is it just me, or is this quest more complicated than the last one?" Mike grumbled. "I mean, we did have a lot of issues with all the shit that was going on, but the quest itself wasn't hard. It was pretty basic. I'm not sure why, but I just know it was basic."

Without thinking, Drake explained. "The first ascension quest was to confirm we are a cohort. All members had to be present. It was a confirmation that we were in this together. This one is about critical thinking and our ability to retain knowledge and use that knowledge as a team. We gain knowledge from what we learn and see. The hand is important. I can tell it is. Each finger is us. I am at the palm because I'm the dimension master heir. You're at the fingers because you're an extension of me; You're my cohort. At least that's what I see. The third tunnel would be the middle finger, regardless of which hand you look at it. I feel like it represents our path. Where we all lead."

Chad nodded approvingly. "I'm pretty sure you're on point. Besides, he said, smiling, we're already at the end of the tunnel." Chad stood at the end of the small tunnel scanning the walls, floor, and ceiling. He didn't see anything. He pulled out his sword for more light. That's when he saw it. The light of the sword made a faint glow beneath his feet.

He bent down and uncovered what was hiding in the dirt. It was a glowing white key. He picked it up, smiling brightly. "I found it," he whispered.

Drake thought about it for a moment, seeing that Chad had found his key using his healing sword. That told him that the swords needed to be used as well. They needed to keep them all glowing, in case they came across something that only the glow of the swords would find.

"I think our swords are going to play a big part in completing this quest. So far, we've been lucky, but I feel like we need the keys first, then find the combination to open a preverbal lock to gain access to the book. My gut says that the three tunnels are the lock, and we need to find the combination to open it," Drake murmured. He spoke softly, still thinking. He was trying to figure out everything that was happening in the tunnels. His gut told him that it was all important... Every detail. The quest was teaching him to look at things as pieces of a larger whole.

He turned around and headed out of the fourth tunnel toward the palm. 'Pieces of a larger whole...pieces of a larger whole...pieces of a larger whole...' Drake kept

mumbling to himself as he walked. His friends glanced between each other, then at Drake. Neither was willing to ask him what he was thinking.

Drake's mantra never stopped. All the way to the end of the tunnel until they were back in the palm, He kept mumbling. He only stopped when they reached the palm, ready to go through the third tunnel where their real work would begin.

The eerie feeling persisted, and the feeling of dread remained, but he fought through it as he tried to decipher the tunnel's hidden secrets. Drake knew that everything was important. The hand... it told him the positions of he and his cohort. As a whole, the tunnels were a hand. The one going outside leads to the dimension. Drake and his cohort acted as a hand to the dimension to keep it safe. He was at the palm, the one guiding the fingers to do what needed to be done. He knew he needed all his fingers to do that. Lacking any, it would make it difficult to do their job. The hand showed that he and his cohort worked on behalf of the dimension. The middle finger was the path, but it was also the lock. They were the key to following their path. Drake smiled to himself as he continued his mantra.

"What do you mean, pieces of a larger whole?" Mike finally asked. Drake had mumbled the same sentence as if it were a mantra the entire way back. If it was something that Drake was fixated on, it had to mean something, and it had to be something important.

Drake shook his head. "I'm just thinking. Everything we find and do in these tunnels is just pieces of a greater whole. Everything is important and means something; We need to remember that. It's the only way we can complete this quest. I know that as well." He smiled widely. "Besides, I figured out the meaning of the hand."

## **Chapter 88: 88: Chamber Tunnel / The Third Tunnel**

Entering the third and final tunnel of the massive hand, the eerie feeling wrapped around them tighter. It was like a snake, squeezing the life out of them. They all felt it. Their faces paled as they quickly pulled out their weapons and filled them with the soft glow of their respective energy, producing flickering shadows as they made their way toward the tunnel where it would split into three separate paths.

They knew there was something in the tunnels with them. They had felt it for a while. It was only now that it was getting stronger. They had to watch for whatever was stalking them, as well as items required to access the Master Spell book. They were exhausted, but knew they had to try to keep going. They had a timer they had to worry about, and there was still too much to do to complete the quest.

"Keep your eyes peeled for hidden items," Drake reminded them. His voice was low, shaking subtly as he spoke. "We still don't know if there are still things to find. We also need to solve the puzzle. We have a key representing each of us. The tunnels look like a hand. I am at the palm, and each of the cohort is a finger. The thumb is the way out, and it represents the dimension. What I don't get is the two tunnels before the Chamber

of Knowledge. Any ideas?" he asked, hoping that his friends could come up with an idea of what it might mean.

"No, but maybe it's like a combination lock. Maybe we just have to figure out what the combination is," Mike offered. He didn't really agree with his own words. He was just tossing ideas out there. He was at a loss as to what any of it meant. He wasn't even sure if Drake was right about the tunnels being a hand.

Drake yawned, causing the others to do the same. They were all exhausted, having difficulty staying awake. They needed rest but were afraid to stop their search. Not with the dwindling timer hanging over them like the sword of Damocles.

"I sure hope none of the other quests are timed. This really sucks," Mike grumbled, yawning again, trying desperately to keep his eyes open. Then his stomach grumbled, telling him he was hungry as well.

Chad nodded in agreement, yawning. It was getting contagious. If one yawned, it would force the other to do it as well. He desperately tried to keep his eyes open as they made their way down the tunnel.

They moved slowly through the tunnel, exhausted and weary of danger. They were hungry too, having not eaten for over a full day. They needed to sleep. If they didn't, they would undoubtedly collapse. It was a double-edged sword. If they didn't sleep, they would be put in danger if something came out and attacked them. They would be too tired to fight at their best, making it difficult to defend themselves properly. Yet, they also needed to complete their timed quest. If they slept, they worried that they wouldn't finish in time. Sleeping could cause them to waste valuable time. It was time they were short on.

Drake sighed, rubbing his eyes. They were turning increasingly heavy from exhaustion. "Head to the Chamber of Knowledge. We need to rest. We already know it's a short tunnel," Drake conceded, realizing that they needed to try to get some sleep. They needed to eat something, too. Something quick. He didn't like the increasingly eerie feeling, but knew they had to overlook it and get to the chamber before whatever was in the tunnels with them came out at them. Once there, he could put up a protective barrier so they could sleep in peace.

The short tunnel to the Chamber of Knowledge revealed that there were no hidden items. They had been looking for hidden items with both their magical vision as well as their sword's energy. There was nothing. When they went into the Chamber of Knowledge, they quickly scanned the chamber, still finding nothing.

Drake used the master staff, hitting it lightly on the ground. The giant emerald at its top began to produce a soft green light that shone brightly, lighting the entire room. They studied the chamber again; this time, they could see a glow on the dirt podium that revealed small glowing circles, each colored to correspond with the keys. There was

another spot in the center, but they didn't have anything for that location. That told Drake that they still needed to inspect the other two tunnels.

Sighing deeply, he placed a magical barrier at the chamber's entryway to protect them while they slept, then sat on the floor, leaning against the wall of the tunnel. "Eat something then, sleep," he ordered his friends. "If we collapse from exhaustion during a battle, we're as good as dead. There would be no need for the dimension to kill us, because our exhaustion would get us killed."

Understanding the need, Mike and Chad sat against the wall next to Drake. The three of them quickly ate one of the many sandwiches Chad had in his storage ring. When they were done, they leaned against the wall and closed their eyes. They all fell asleep immediately.

\*\*\*

Back in the ordinary world, in Drake's room, Drake's father watched the boys on the computer screen. Chad's and Mike's fathers sat behind him as they watched their own sons on the screen. They watched as the boys had finally conceded to sleeping, even though they were on a timed quest. He understood. It was dangerous to try to stay awake longer than the body could handle. They had been awake for a long time. Their bodies were at their limit and needed rest.

"It's good that Drake placed a protective shield over the entrance of the chamber," Chad's father pointed out, worried that the boys had stopped to sleep, but impressed by the protective actions they took. "They're almost done with that quest. If I remember correctly, I think they need to solve the combination before they can place the keys, but they're doing really well."

"Unless their quest is different than the one that we had," Mike's father pointed out. "Their quest looks the same, but also different. I can't put my finger on what's different. I think it's the extra chamber. There should only be two, not three, in the third tunnel. Besides that, I don't see anything different from the one we did."

"I was wondering that too," Drake's father said calmly. He sat in thought for a moment, watching the boys sleep. "Did you notice they're prepared to fight something. It's like their instincts are telling them that there is danger somewhere nearby. I saw their faces go pale suddenly, then they immediately pulled out their swords. Something is wrong. I know there is something wrong. They wouldn't have acted that way if there wasn't. I just don't know what it could be. I've been looking, trying to figure out what's wrong, but I don't see anything."

Chad's father studied the screen, trying to see anything that looked... off, but didn't find anything either. "I bet that's why Drake put up the barrier. They felt something. Danger or something following them, or just the general feeling of wrongness, so he wanted to make sure they didn't get attacked while they tried to rest."

The three fathers watched their sons as they slept. Even their beast slept, exhausted by the days they had stayed awake. They knew that the quest should only be five days. They had been gone for four days already. They didn't really have time to be sleeping, but they looked utterly exhausted. They all prayed that the boys could wake up soon and complete it before the time ran out.

The men didn't know that the time on the ascension quest counter had been reset as a result of saving Nelly, though. In their minds, the boys were wasting too much time. If they didn't finish, they would die.

\*\*\*

Back in the Chamber of Knowledge, in the darkness on the outside of the chamber, dark eyes looked through the glowing green barrier unseen by those who watched from the ordinary world or the sleeping boys with their small beast.

The figure scanned the chamber, looking at every detail. There were only smooth walls and the podium that remained empty. The figure's gaze went back to the sleeping boys with their beast; A wide grin appeared on the figure's fanged lips.

He knew their quest was nearly over. There would be a lot to do to prepare. The figure grinned wider in anticipation as he stared through the barrier into the chamber at the boys.

'Patience... patience... that's what is needed. The young heirs will be finished with their quest soon. Then, when they start their third, it will be time to act.'

## **Chapter 89: 89: Three Prong Fork / Tunnel 1**

Inside the Chamber of Knowledge, Drake and his cohort stood, then stretched with renewed energy. They had all gotten enough rest to proceed on their quest safely. They knew something was lurking in the tunnels.

Now, since they had rested, they could defend themselves without worry of collapsing out of exhaustion or getting themselves killed due to being too tired to fight.

While Chad pulled out sandwiches, Drake brought up the system, looking at the remaining time on their timed ascension quest.

**{Timed Quest: 02:04:06:45 remaining}**

Drake sighed as he took a sandwich from his friend, quickly taking a bite, then opening another one for Renn. "We have two days, four hours, six minutes, and forty-five seconds and counting. We still have time, but we still have a long way to go. We need to eat quickly, then try to finish this quest. We don't know how long the last two tunnels are, yet. We have to remember it took an entire day to get through the first tunnel.

These two could be just as long. We probably have to figure out what to do once we finish searching the tunnels. There might be something similar to what we did in the last one, where nothing would happen until we all stood on the platform. This could have similar conditions. We don't know how long it will take us to figure out what that condition is."

The cohort nodded in agreement; they already knew what they were up against. The tunnels could be never-ending. On top of all of that, there could be yet another split that they would have to search through. They didn't have much time.

Standing up, Drake removed the glowing protective barrier at the chamber's entrance and began leaving, heading back into the tunnel toward the small area where the tunnels split into three. Mike and Chad followed behind him. Renn was on Drake's shoulder, peering into the darkness. She was too large to fit in the tunnel in her regular form, so she had to stay as a rat.

Drake and his cohort rushed down the short tunnel, heading for the split. They had planned to go in order, starting with the first of the three tunnels. They all hoped desperately that they would find what they needed without encountering any more issues or anything else that would hinder them. They didn't want more tunnels added, either. If one of the other two tunnels were to split, it would make it difficult to finish their quest in time. They were short on time as it was.

It didn't take them long to reach where the tunnels split, since they didn't have to search them again. They had already checked that area of the tunnel. Once they reached their destination, they stood in front of the three tunnels. "Well, we have two tunnels to search. The easiest way is to start with the first one," Drake stated, staring at the entrance. Before he did, he held the glowing staff up, staring at the floor and ceiling of the tunnel, trying to see if something hid under the dirt. He had found his own key in the chamber where everything split, so he wanted to see if there was something in this one, too. "Nothing," he sighed, then began walking into the first tunnel.

The eerie feeling from the previous day was gone, as if whatever danger was out there had decided not to stalk them anymore. The absence of it seemed off... unnatural. Regardless of whether the feeling was no longer there, he kept his guard up, not trusting that whatever was out there was really gone. As they walked, Drake wondered why the absence of the feeling felt wrong. It didn't make any sense.

Drake had his little lantern glowing softly. It was attached to his belt, keeping his hands free. His master staff glowed brightly, lighting the way; his sword, with its intricate runes along the elegant blade, shone with a soft green glow. He was using everything but his whip to see the walls around him. He only had two hands after all.

Chad had his sword out; it pulsed softly with its soft white light that reflected off the smooth dirt walls, helping to light the way.

Mike had his own sword in his hands, gripped tightly, its blade a soft white with electric blue lightning crackling softly as it pulsed up and down the blade. The electric blue as it traveled up and down the blade, causing a strobe light effect on the walls as they made their way down the tunnel.

Drake and his cohort had their eyes glowing brightly, searching the tunnel for anything they were meant to find. There was nothing so far.

Renn watched from her perch on Drake's shoulder, sniffing the air and scanning with her own glowing green eyes. She found nothing either.

They slowly walked through the tunnel, their eyes scanning every inch of it, searching for items and other chambers, but they found that the walls were just as smooth as all the others. There were no openings, no ledges, nothing.

The tunnel wasn't that big. It was only roughly one hundred feet long, which ended abruptly.

Where the tunnel ended, the wall was flat, its surface smooth as if it had been lightly polished. It looked different than the other walls of the tunnel. The end of the tunnel resembled a brick wall rather than a wall made from packed dirt. Drake touched the smooth surface, his eyes glowing brightly as he scanned the area with his magical vision. Mike and Chad did the same. They saw nothing.

Drake could feel it, though. His instincts told him that there was something here to find. He just didn't know what it could be, so he kept searching.

Almost out of instinct, Drake and his friends let their swords glow brightly, then moved the glowing blades close to the wall. An image formed, carved in the flat surface, resembling a star constellation that twinkled with the combined swords' soft glowing light. They stared for a moment, moving a little closer to study the design, when one area of the wall began to pulse. Drake studied it for a moment before he pressed the pulsing area with his hand, which caused the flat surface to slide open like a door. It revealed a small chamber hidden on the other side.

Cautiously, Drake and his cohort stepped inside and scanned the area. The small chamber appeared completely devoid of anything. They couldn't find anything, even when they used their vision, swords, and even the staff's brilliant green light, trying to find something... anything. There was nothing to see.

Drake thought for a while, thinking about the video games he played at home. That was when he remembered one of his games; he smiled. "I think opening the door is what we were supposed to do. It took all of us to make the image appear so that I could press the button to open it. Let's head back and go into the second tunnel." In some of his dungeon-clearing games, he had to open a door that would open something somewhere else in the dungeon. He was positive that this was one of those times.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked. "If we have to come back, it's going to waste a lot of time," he worried aloud.

Chad stayed silent. He trusted Drake. He was the gamer of the group and would recognize things that they wouldn't. Since their quest seemed to resemble the games Drake played, he was certain that if Drake said that opening the wall was all they needed, then that was all they needed.

"I'm positive. In some of my dungeon-clearing games, there is something you have to activate to open a door somewhere else in the dungeon. This feels like it's one of those times," he explained. "I think opening this door will activate something else in these tunnels." Then he thought for a few more moments before he added, "We might have to come back to this small chamber again after the second tunnel. It's short, so it shouldn't take long if we have to do that. Unless you've played the games I'm thinking of, you won't understand what I'm trying to describe. Anyway, in my games, you activate something that will open something else. We just opened a door that might have activated something in another tunnel, which might produce something in here that we have to come back to retrieve. I think this is what it's doing."

Mike sighed, shaking his head, still not convinced, and followed Drake as he exited the small chamber. They quickly headed back down the tunnel to return to the split so they could search the second tunnel. Silently hoping that it was a short one, just like the current tunnel that they were in.

It didn't take them very long to reach the small area where the three tunnels were split. The tunnel was short. When they reached the small area where the three tunnels split, they turned toward the second tunnel.

## **Chapter 90: 90: Tunnel 2**

Staring at the second tunnel, Drake held his staff up and peered into the darkness. "Well, this is the last one unless it splits again," Drake stated calmly. "We might have to go back to the little chamber in the first tunnel if it's what I think it is. After that, I'm pretty sure we need to go back to the Chamber of Knowledge."

It didn't take them very long to go through the previous tunnel, nor to open the hidden door. Now they needed to go through this one so they could complete their quest. As far as Drake knew, this was the last tunnel that they had to search. He hoped that this was the final tunnel. He didn't want to have to go through any more of them. They were too short on time.

With one last sigh, Drake entered the tunnel. His friends followed close behind him. They had their eyes and swords still glowing, as well as the Master staff. They didn't want to miss anything.

Like all the other tunnels, the walls were smooth, devoid of indentations or openings. The dark depths were shadowed in darkness, preventing them from knowing how long the tunnel was.

They scanned the tunnel as they walked, hoping that it would be a short one.

They could hear sounds in the distance. It made Renn hiss. She didn't like whatever was up ahead. Drake whispered to his friends, who could also hear the noise. They gripped their swords tighter, ready to fight whatever was hiding in the darkness. "There's something up ahead. Be prepared to fight. If it's anything like those worms, don't let them overwhelm you."

Out of instinct, Drake softly tapped the staff on the ground. A wave of soft green energy burst out, spreading in front of them. Shrieks were heard as the wave of energy flowed through the tunnel.

**{You have slain a Level 3 tunnel leech}**

**{You have slain a Level 3 tunnel leech}**

**{You have slain a Level 3 tunnel leech}... ..**

The system continued sending notifications, seemingly never-ending. Power rose in Drake and his cohort as the messages continued one after the other.

As the wave of energy continued, more shrieks could be heard in the dark depths of the tunnel until the soft energy finally evaporated out of existence. The glow of light particles from the leech's deaths lit the entire length of the tunnel, briefly showing that they had all been slain. Items spread out along the tunnel glistened as the light particles flickered, then vanished.

Drake wished he could see what was dropped, but the system didn't have that function. He had to keep an eye out and find whatever items were there as they searched the tunnel for their quest items.

"Watch for items dropped by the tunnel leeches," Drake advised. "I know there are a few, but I don't know what they were. My system was sending notifications one after the other, and I was too busy paying attention to what was happening with my energy, so I don't know what was dropped or how many items there were."

"I hope it's something good, whatever it is. We haven't really gotten anything for a while," Mike began, "It would be nice to get something that we can really use, like our weapons and Renn's armor."

Chad nodded in agreement, his focus on the tunnel around them. He was already looking for loot dropped by the leeches. Mike wasn't the only one who was tired of not getting anything from killing the beasts.

Renn squeaked softly on Drake's shoulder as he scanned the tunnel with her glowing green eyes. She leaped onto the ground and scampered down the tunnel. She wasn't going that fast. She wanted to find the loot and bring it back or send Drake an image of what she had found during her search.

Drake led Mike and Chad through the tunnel as they scanned the area for both items and loot. Drake didn't think there would be any items until the end of the tunnel. The only loot they would find would be from the slain leeches.

He didn't want to assume, so he kept searching with his magical eyes to see if there was anything under the dirt as they traveled down the tunnel.

After going nearly thirty feet, they found their first bit of loot. There were three small piles. One was a bag of silver coins. The bag was translucent as if it were made of the leech's skin. The second pile was a quiver of arrows. Their razor-sharp tips were translucent like glass and shimmered softly with a white light. The last pile was a pair of translucent blades that resembled crystal shards meant to attach to gauntlets.

Drake handed the crystalline blades to Mike and the quiver of translucent arrows to Chad, keeping the silver coins for himself. Double-checking the area, they continued down the tunnel. Renn came back to Drake, not being able to carry anything that she had found. She quickly leaped back onto Drake's shoulder and squeaked softly as they searched for more loot.

Mike took the blades, grinning widely as he studied the detail. Snapping them onto his gauntlets, the translucent blades shimmered and melted, the liquid running slowly over the metallic curved blades of the gauntlets. When the liquid settled, there was only one set of blades, but they had been altered. The curved blades had sharpened, creating a far more lethal edge that shimmered with a soft white light.

Chad studied the arrow tips after seeing what Mike's gauntlet blades had done. He wasn't sure what his own arrows would do, but decided to check later. He was currently using his sword, not his bow. After placing the quiver into his dimensional storage ring, he walked behind Drake and continued to search for more loot.

Drake had stored the silver in his storage cuff, not bothering to store it in his book. That would take a bit of extra time.

After going several feet, there was another pile of loot. Drake bent down and picked it up, inspecting it. It was a ring made out of translucent material, the same as the other. He wanted to be fair, so he held onto it until they found more, intending to split the loot evenly.

Another pile lay near one of the walls. It was another bag of silver in a translucent bag. He held that one too, placing it in his cuff next to the ring. After only a few steps, they could see another item. It belonged on a sword. Drake studied it. It had the same runes as Mike's. He stored it as well, not wanting to hand out loot until each of them had an equal amount of it.

After searching the tunnel, they found only three piles of loot left. There was a translucent whip and two bags of silver. He kept the whip, pulled out the sword attachment, handed it to Mike, then handed Chad the ring. "I think the ring is yours, but I'm not sure. If you can tell it's not, let me know, and I'll trade a bag of silver for it." He then handed a bag of silver to each Mike and Chad. "I think I gave everything to who was supposed to have it. I wasn't sure about the ring, though.

Chad studied the ring carefully, then put it on. It shimmered briefly before darkening. "I don't think it's mine," he stated, taking it off and handing it back to Drake.

Drake put it on, trying to see if it was his. When he placed it on his finger, it transformed into a glowing green crystal ring. The shape changed, reshaping into a thin ring that adjusted to fit his own finger. The top, bubbling up to form a larger area, then flattened. A thin line swirled, forming an insignia on the flat surface. The soft glow remained, not darkening like the others. Drake smiled, pulling out a bag of silver, and handed it to Chad. "Now I think we have what we were meant to have."

Drake put his sword in its sheath, then uncoiled his whip. Taking the translucent whip, then snapped the handles together. The translucent whip melted and then formed onto his metallic whip along its entire length. When it had completed, his whip shimmered with a lethal air. The blade's sharp tip, now translucent, glowed softly with a shimmering green light.

Recoiling his whip, he pulled his sword, allowing the soft green glow to encase his blade as they continued their search.

They found no more loot on their way, nor did they find any items meant for their quest. It took nearly an hour to reach the end of the tunnel.

At the end of the tunnel was yet another chamber. It was roughly six feet in diameter. The walls were smooth and rounded. There were no indents or openings. It appeared empty, but Drake knew there had to be something hiding. At least, that's what he was thinking.