

Daisy and the Dream Defenders

Book 1

By

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Summary

Because every kid deserves a Daisy...

When sixth-grader Tommy Henderson discovers his dreams—and *nightmares*—are becoming real, a world of fantasy adventure begins as *Daisy and the Dream Defenders* arrive on Earth to battle a terrifying Darkness stealing the dreams of Earth's children.

Tommy's life isn't going well. It's been a tough time. It's complicated. Everything's going wrong. His parents are divorcing. He's bullied at school. His best friend moved away, and the girl he's had a crush on since forever doesn't even know his name.

But Tommy slowly discovers an ability to *see other worlds* within his dreams, worlds revealed as comic book illustrations. Increasingly unable to separate dream from reality, the comic book characters and scenes break their fictional borders and merge into his actual life.

Tommy learns that a noir detective from 1948 has transported to his hometown of Kansas City. The detective is the last remaining Dream Detective from the now defunct *Dream Department*, a specialized group of detectives that banish old nightmares—Frankenstein's, Witches and Mummies—that have slipped out of old dimensions and now randomly appear on Earth. But the detective's powers are not strong enough to battle modern day's Nightmare Darkness and is soon joined by a good witch and *Dream Defender* pilots, Jack Shadow and Captain Jessica Star.

When Jack's ship crashes in Tommy's backyard, in a quiet suburb of Kansas City, Tommy is discovered to be the Dream Source that *Daisy and the Dream Defenders* have been

searching for. Together, they battle a Nightmare Darkness that threatens all children and, with Tommy's special powers as a Dream Source, they discover Dreamlight on Earth—the purest light that fuels and saves the dreams of all children everywhere. *Book 1* of Daisy and the Dream Defenders fantasy-adventures series is complete at 70,000 words.

Prologue

We are the Dream Defenders—forever dedicated to the protection of all dreams within multi-dimensional time. Our mission is to defend dreams by banishing, battling or destroying the darkest Nightmare world. We defend with all the power and discipline granted and vested our kind. Honored to uphold the duty of our charge, we are hereby sworn to protect all children's precious dreams and to guard our Queen and the Candle Fortress—with our lives.

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"It's past your bedtime, honey," Tommy's mom says from the kitchen.

"Mom, I'm almost in seventh grade," annoyed that he still has a bedtime at his age.

"Well, maybe next year you can have a later bedtime—but not this year."

"Five more minutes, Mom—I'm almost at the next level," he says, as always sitting too close to the TV playing his video games.

"That's fine, but only five minutes, okay?"

"Yeah, Mom."

“And you can read in bed if you want, okay?”

“Okay, mom,” still annoyed.

“And please don’t sit so close to the TV, Tommy. It’s bad for your eyes.”

“*Okay*,” he says, scooting back so he’s not so close, tired of being talked to like a kid.

“I’ve had a long day, honey, I’m going to bed early. Don’t forget to shut off all the lights.

Did you put your clothes in the dryer?”

“No, I forgot,” he says, now kind of mad at himself.

“Okay, get them in the dryer before you go to bed.”

“Alright, mom,” he says, seriously bummed he forgot to do that while it was still light outside.

He hates it, but he’s still afraid of the dark—especially the basement.

I’m in sixth grade, man—everything’s cool, he says to himself. But it doesn’t matter what he tells himself, the darkness still scares him. He feels it in his bones, always something cold and creepy coming after him.

Another thing he doesn’t want to admit—he sort of hates when his mom goes to bed early. He has to shut off all lights and hurry down the dark hall to his bedroom, always feeling something behind him—even if he knows there are no such things as dark, scary creatures. Sometimes he leaves the living room light on so he doesn’t have to walk down the dark hallway to his bedroom. But the basement is the worst—just the worst.

One of his chores is doing his laundry. He always does it during the day, when it’s still light out. But he was out riding bikes with his buddy and didn’t get back till dinner. And then his favorite show was on so he forgot all about the laundry.

And now it’s night.

The later it is, the scarier it feels to go down to the basement's laundry room. It's dark down there, really dark.

When he finally gets to the next level of his video game, he turns the audio up loud so he can still hear it when going downstairs. He thinks maybe if he can hear something from the real world, the nightmare world won't find him. Because there is something down there, something mean and dark and scary—he can feel it in his bones. He hates it, hates all of it. It's scared him his whole life—always feeling like something is just about to get him.

It's always been the same feeling, the same exact feeling. Something's coming around the corner, or from under his bed, something dark and deadly that will grab his legs and pull him down the stairs and he'll never make it back up to safety. His skin is already tingling when he gets to the top of the stairs, his heart starts to beat a little faster.

He psyches himself up and says, *C'mon man*, as he heads down the basement stairs. But he can already feel it. There isn't a light for the stairs, so all he can see as he walks down the stairs is darkness. At the bottom of the stairs, to the left is a storage room with boxes and old things, a room he hates going into, even during the day. To his right it's four or five steps to the garage entrance. And just before the garage door he turns right and into the lightless laundry room where a little metal chain for the overhead light hangs down.

He quickly moves to the light chain, but because it's so dark he can't always find it fast enough and has to stand there in the pitch dark, his hand reaching around in the darkness above his head and feeling more and more vulnerable to some kind of creature creeping out from the storage room. The longer it takes him to find the light's pull chain the more scared he feels, the chill running up and down his body. He finally finds it and pulls the light on, just in time before the darkness had overwhelmed him.

To make matters worse, the lightbulb is low wattage and sort of dim. It casts weird and eerie shadows in the basement's cool and cramped little laundry room. He knows the longer he's down there, the worse it gets. There's a dirty little half-window at ground level to his left, covered in spiderwebs. At this time of night, all he can see out the window are strange shadowy shapes and more darkness—it looks like another planet out there.

As he hurriedly puts clothes in the dryer, something crawls out of the ground and over to the little basement window, something no more than two feet tall with sharply pointed, webbed talons that it now uses to slowly start to slide the window open. Pressing its scaly green face against the glass, it appears to have a strange sort of green antenna protruding from the top of its head and angled slightly back. It bares its razor sharp teeth and hungrily licks the window with its nasty, barbed tongue.

For just a second, Tommy thinks he hears something, something outside. When he turns to the window—there's nothing there—but the window has slid open a little. Unless his mom is airing out the humid basement on a sunny day, that window is rarely open—and never at night. He thinks maybe to close it—but he would have to find something to stand on and he really wants to get out of there—so he turns back to the dryer and closes the metal door as quietly as he can, afraid the sound of the metal door will call out the dark creatures that know he's there...*and alone.*

The problem is there's only that one light above him for the laundry room. So after he's set the dryer time, he takes a breath to calm himself, pulls the light chain as everything goes dark—pitch dark. Immediately, he feels that chilly coolness of the basement in his bones and hurries out of the laundry room.

He makes a quick left at the bottom of the stairs and stops hard in his tracks...in front of him is a deep, dark forest with ominous trees and what feels like something alive up in the strange, dark, dead branches and hears what sounds like a hissing sound, not wind, but hissing. What were his stairs are now old, broken stones covered in black leaves that lead up. Pushing aside a dead branch that blocks his path, straining to see through the heavy, dark foliage, he can just make out the living room at the top of the old stone stairs, the light of a lamp weakly shining down into the dark forest. Panicking, his heart thundering.

Tommy's not a fast runner, but he never moves faster than when he runs up the basement stairs, always feeling something horrible behind him. His feet barely touch the stones and taking two at a time as he flies up fast. Finally when he gets to the top of the stairs, the chill in his bones makes him shiver as his skin starts to crawl, he looks back, just to make sure it wasn't real, just to make sure nothing followed him up—and again, everything is normal. No forest. No nothing. Just the basement stairs.

Now standing at the top of the stairs, he's sort of freaking out but also...*not*. Hard to explain. He's always had weird dreams, weird feelings—weird daydream visions. He's seen this forest in his dreams lately and maybe his imagination just ran away, like always. He shakes his head and says, *C'mon, man*. But the moment Tommy walks away, a dark, slimy tentacle reaches around the corner with dark red eyes and a slobbering mouth. Seeing that Tommy is gone, it pulls back, leaving a puddle of saliva on the floor.

"Honey," his mom calls out from her bedroom down the hall, "It's bedtime."

"Okay, Mom," and he knows when he turns off the living room lights it will be dark again while walking down the hallway to his bedroom. He reaches under the big living room

lamp, feels that tingling again, shuts the light off, quickly pulls his hand out from under the lampshade and hurries down the hallway with that same creeping feeling at his back.

In his room, he's still not feeling quite safe. He throws his clothes on the floor and his desk chair. The bulb on the night table burnt out yesterday. Regretting he forgot to get a new one, he flips off the light switch by his door, steps quickly and jumps over that dark space under the bed. Fast, he pulls up the covers and holds still a moment, listening for whatever is under his bed and finally falling asleep.

Later that night, Tommy's fast asleep with his head under the covers when a smoky dark presence gathers under his bed. The room is suddenly cold as the darkness takes shape as a long, slimy tentacle that's dripping some kind of black ooze—burning the carpet where it lands. Slowly, it reaches up from under his bed and wraps itself around Tommy's blanket—pulling the blanket off. Still asleep, Tommy reaches for the blanket and pulls it back up, curling underneath from the chilly room.

Again the creature slowly winds around and creeps back up, pulling the covers back just enough to expose Tommy's head. But this time, the end of the black, slimy tentacle opens up like a grotesque dark flower, lined with sharp little teeth all around, forming a suction cup mouth that begins to cover Tommy's head when he suddenly wakes, sits up fast, feels his head and looks around the room. For a split second, he thought he saw something, felt something...but there's nothing there.

He's mad that he forgot to change the bedside table light. The new bulbs are in the closet just outside his bedroom door. But there's no way he's putting his feet back on the ground, not this late, not in the middle of the night. He looks around one last time, notices the blanket is almost on the floor, pulls it back up and soon falls back into a deep, deep sleep.

At breakfast the next morning, Tommy's mom is making coffee, texting with work and otherwise in the middle of her morning routine before taking off for work. She's not listening but has the local news on when the anchorwoman is heard to say, "A curious development is being reported around the country. Some children are having a hard time waking up, something more than being groggy. Stephanie Blake is live at a local elementary school—Stephanie?"

"Good morning. Yes, and although still a series of isolated events, there is increasing concern pertaining to children's sleep habits. It's being reported by parents and teachers that a troubling pattern of children's inability to wake up as they normally would. For an hour or two after waking, the children seem to still be half-asleep. I'm here with second grade teacher Debra Olson," she says, and turning with the microphone, asks, "Debra you've experienced this strange phenomena with the children in your school?"

"Only once, and I didn't think anything about it, to be honest. But I've heard some other teachers and parents are saying the same."

"That the kids aren't waking up in a normal way?"

"Yes, for an hour or two before they snap out of it."

"One parent was reported saying her child seemed almost zombie-like."

"Well, I haven't heard that but yes it's all very strange."

"Thank you for your time this morning, Debra" she says, turning back to the camera, "That's all for now. Stephanie Blake with 11 live news."

“Thank you, Stephanie, the anchorwoman says, turning back to the camera, “Stay tuned, we’ll be back...”

Having caught the last of the news story, Tommy’s mom asks, “Have you heard anything about this?”

“About what Mom?” having not been listening to the news.

“These kids who aren’t waking up,” and then says with serious expression, “Are you feeling okay, feeling normal?”

“I mean, whatever normal is...yeah.”

“You know what I mean, Tommy.”

“Yeah, Mom—I feel fine.”

“Good,” she says, pouring herself another cup of coffee for the road, “Isn’t today the bring something from home day?”

“Yeah,” he says, wishing she’d forgotten.

“What are you taking?”

“Nothing.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know... don’t feel like it.”

“Well, okay. But it seems like you could take *something*.”

“You have to get up in front of the class and talk about it, Mom...I don’t like doing that,” he says, not mentioning that the girl he has a crush on is in that class and he doesn’t want to look lame and dumb in front of her.

“Okay, honey, but you should tell your teacher the truth—that you feel uncomfortable in front of people right now. You’re going through some difficult things emotionally so I’m sure she’ll understand.”

“Alright, Mom,” not wanting to talk about the divorce again.

“Well, I’m off,” she says, “Don’t miss your bus.”

“I’ve still got a few minutes, Mom.”

“Okay, have a good day at school. Love you, honey.”

“Love you too, Mom.”

And from downstairs, just before she walks into the garage, his mom calls out, “Tommy what are all these leaves on the stairs? Please don’t track things in and please clean it up after school. Love you,” she says as he hears the garage door open.

Leaves? Tommy thinks, and then with a chill remembers...the dark forest.

Still sitting at the breakfast table, from the corner of his eye he thinks he sees something moving on the kitchen counter, thinks he hears something. But when he glances up, everything seems normal. Just to be sure, he gets up, walks over to the counter and notices the toaster lever has been pushed down, like it’s making toast, like someone had pushed it down. Maybe his mom had meant to make him another piece of toast?.

When he looks more closely it suddenly *pops up* with a loud metal sound and he jumps back—his heart’s racing as he suddenly feels that tingling feeling again, the same one he feels in the darkness. He steps back up and looks into the toaster, he sees that it’s empty—no bread, no toast, no nothing.

The bus! He says to himself, having lost track of time. Grabbing his bookbag and skateboard, he runs out the door and arrives at the bus stop as it's pulling up. Once on board and settled in a seat, he looks back at his house and his skin tingles again—something feels different.

Turns out, it's one of those days in school that seem to last forever, like it's never going to end. He's dreading his homeroom class, knowing he didn't bring something to share with classmates. Hurrying into class but arriving last, the teacher gives him a look. Tommy was never late for classes late but his parents divorcing makes everything feel different. He sometimes does things now he didn't before—like being late to class.

As always, Jenny's sitting in the front row. She's the girl he's always had a crush on, a kind of crush that keeps him from speaking or thinking clearly around her. His body and mind feel awkward and supercharged. When Tommy walks into class, he always tells himself not to glance over at her, to keep his eyes down, but he glances anyway. He can't help it, his feelings are just so overwhelming when near her.