

# *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 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 dreams from reality, the comic book characters and scenes break their fictional borders and merge into his life.

Tommy learns that a noir detective from 1948 has been 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 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 extraordinary 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 protecting all dreams within multi-dimensional space-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 our kind. Honored to uphold the duty of our charge, we are now sworn to protect all children’s precious dreams—with our lives.*

## 1

“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 you can have a later bedtime next year—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 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—everything’s cool*, he often 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 is that he hates it when his mom goes to bed early. He has to shut off all the lights and hurry down the dark hall to his bedroom, constantly feeling something behind him—even if he knows there’s no such thing 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 rode bikes with his buddy and didn't return till dinner. His favorite show was on, so he forgot all about his laundry.

And now it's night.

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

When his game's over, he turns the TV up loud so he can still hear it when he goes downstairs. He thinks maybe if he can hear something from the real world, the nightmare world won't find him. Because there's something down there, something mean and dark and scary. He hates it, hates all of it. It's scared him his whole life—constantly feeling like something is just about to get him.

It's always been the same feeling. Something coming around the corner, or from under his bead, something dark and deadly that will grab his legs and pull him down the stairs so that 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 beating 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. To the left, at the bottom of the stairs, is a storage room with boxes and old things, which he hates going into, even during the day. It's four or five steps to his right to the garage entrance. Just before the garage door, he turns into the lightless laundry room, where a little metal chain hangs for the overhead light.

He quickly moves to the light chain, but because it's so dark, he can't always find it fast and has to stand there in the pitch dark as his hand reaches around in the darkness above his

head, feeling more and more vulnerable to some 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 overwhelms him.

To make matters worse, the lightbulb has a low wattage and is dim. It casts weird and eerie shadows in the basement's cool, cramped laundry room. He knows the longer he's down there, the worse it gets. A dirty little half-window is covered in spiderwebs at ground level to his left. 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 his clothes in the dryer, something nasty moves against the house and over to the little basement window. Whatever it is, it's no more than two feet tall with oversized hands and sharply pointed talons for fingers. A small animal is hanging from its mouth, a cat or something that has been so mutilated that it's hard to tell exactly what it is, or was.

Dropping the cat and pressing its scaly green face against the glass, it appears to have a strange green antenna protruding from its head and angled slightly back. Seeing Tommy inside, it bares its sharp teeth, hungrily licks the basement window with its bloody, barbed tongue, and starts to slide the half-window open. But when it senses Tommy has heard something, it picks the cat back up and slips away in the cover of a dark, starless night.

For just a second, Tommy thinks he hears something, something outside. When he turns to the window—there's nothing there—but the window is slid open a little. Unless his mom airs out the humid basement on a sunny day, that window is rarely open—and never at night. He thinks he might close it but would have to find something to stand on and wants to get out of

there. 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 that there is only one light above him for the laundry room. So after he's set the dryer time, he takes a breath to calm himself and 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—hidden in the dark, dead branches. And for a moment, he hears a hissing sound, not wind, but hissing. What were his stairs are now old, broken stones covered in black moss that lead up. Pushing aside a dead branch that blocks his path, straining to see through the heavy, dark foliage, he can 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. Instinctively, for reasons he can't explain, he's not panicking, but his heart is pounding in his chest.

Tommy's not a fast runner, but he never moves faster than when he runs up the basement stairs, constantly feeling something horrible behind him. His feet barely touch the stair-stones as he takes two at a time and flies up fast. When he gets to the top of the stairs, the chill in his bones makes him shiver. He looks back to see that nothing followed him up—and everything is normal again. No forest. No nothing. Just the basement stairs.

Standing there at the top of the stairs, he's kind of freaking out but also... *not*. Hard to explain. He's always had weird dreams, weird feelings—weird daydream visions. He's seen this strange, dead forest in his dreams lately, and maybe his imagination just ran away, as always. He shakes his head, almost smiling, and says, *C'mon, man*. But the moment Tommy walks away, a

dark, slimy tentacle reaches around the corner with 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,” he says, glancing down the hall before reaching under the big living room lamp to shut it off, quickly pulling his hand out and moving fast down the hallway with that same creeping feeling at his back.

In his room, he’s still not safe. He throws his clothes on the floor. The bulb on his nightstand 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 begins to fall asleep.

Later that night, Tommy’s asleep 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 dripping a smoldering black ooze—burning the carpet where it lands. It slowly reaches up from under his bed and wraps itself around Tommy’s blanket—pulling it 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. He thought he saw something briefly, but nothing’s there.

He’s mad at himself for forgetting to change the bedside light. The new bulbs are in the closet just outside his 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 into a deep sleep.

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At breakfast the following day, Tommy's mom makes coffee and texts with work. She is otherwise in the middle of her morning routine before leaving for work. She's not listening but has the local news when the anchorwoman is heard to say, "A curious development—children everywhere are reportedly having a difficult time waking up in normal ways, something more than being sleepy or just groggy. Stephanie Blake is live at a local elementary school. Good morning Stephanie, a troubling occurrence."

"Good morning, Susan. And yes, quite troubling. Although still a series of isolated events, there are increasing reports pertaining to children's sleep habits. This sleep pattern is being reported by parents and teachers alike. The children seem to be half-asleep for an hour or two after waking. I'm here with second-grade teacher Debra Olson," she says, turning with the microphone, "Debra, you've experienced this strange phenomenon with the children in your school?"

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

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

"Well, I haven't heard that, but yes, it's concerning."

"Thank you for your time this morning, Debra," she says, returning to the camera.



“Thank you, Stephanie, the anchorwoman says, “And in an unrelated event, many around the country are reporting their pets missing. Stay tuned for more on that story...”

Having caught the last of the news story, Tommy’s mom says more to herself, “That’s weird.”

“What, Mom?

“The neighbors asked me about their cat—I guess it’s been missing a few days. Have you seen it around the neighborhood?

“No, Mom.”

“Have you heard anything at school about this..?”

“This what, Mom?” he asks, not paying attention and getting lost in his dreamworld.

“Kids not waking up normally,” and then asks with serious expression, “Are you feeling okay in the morning, 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 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 before 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 in front of her.

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

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

“Well, I’m off,” she says, “Keep an eye out for their cat, and 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 can you clean it up after school—love you,” she says as he hears the garage door open.

*Leaves?* Tommy thinks and then 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 and 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 as he jumps back—his heart’s racing as he suddenly feels that tingling feeling again, the same one he feels in

the darkness. When 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 because he's lost track of time. Grabbing his bookbag and skateboard, he runs out the door and arrives at the bus stop just as it pulls up. Climbing on board and settling into his seat, he looks back at his house—something feels different.