

DREAM  
WEAVERS

ROAR OF THE HUNGRY BEAST

To my Dream Team – Angelique, Helena and Maria  
– AS

For Allie, my fellow dreamer and adventurer  
– FB

LITTLE TIGER

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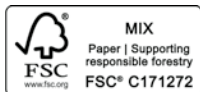
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# DREAM WEAVERS

## ROAR OF THE HUNGRY BEAST



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FORREST BURDETT

LITTLE TIGER

LONDON



# CHAPTER ONE

## KNOW YOUR HISTORY

“And the first known Dreamweaver was...?”

“Ummmmmmmm.” My eyes start to droop. “Ch-choo...”

“Chuang Zu!” Neena says, dropping a heavy book on the table. I jolt upright, suddenly wide awake. I can’t help feeling sleepy, though. It’s so cosy in Neena’s kitchen – the smell of chai cooking on the stove is like a warming hug.

“Neena, don’t quiz Tito so hard.” Her mum, Ameena, chuckles. “Besides, Chuang Zu is only the first Dreamweaver *we* know of.

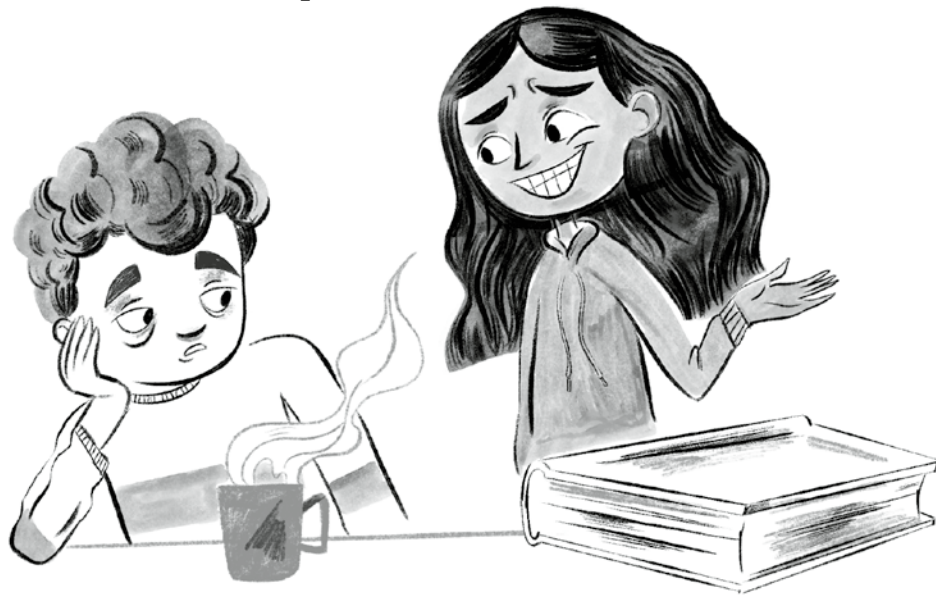
There may have been many more in other parts of the world.”

She comes over and sets a cup of chai down in front of me with a smile. The steam rises and fills my nostrils with cinnamony goodness.

When Neena asked if I'd like to come over on Saturday to study dreamweaving history, I thought it would be fun. I mean, it is *magic* after all. But she's been testing me for HOURS, and now I'm more than ready to have a nap.

“Sorry, Tito, I know I sometimes get overexcited about it,” Neena says, blushing. “It's just great having another Dreamweaver around. How about we just go over the basics one more time?”

I nod and flip back the pages of the cream-coloured journal in front of me. My very own Jinnycyclopedia. Neena has one too, but hers is black and written in her mother tongue, Khowar. She copied out the most important bits for me in English, but it's up to me to fill in the rest of the blank pages of my journal with my very own dreamweaving adventures. I turn to the very first page, the basics.





## HOW TO DREAMWEAVE

1. Choose a symbol special to you. This will be the ticket into your own dream so keep it safe and only share it with those you trust!
2. Draw the symbol on your hand before you go to sleep.
3. Every Dreamweaver has their own special dream – a dreambase. When you fall asleep you'll end up here. (Mine is a clifftop, also known as Titotown.)
4. You can enter other people's dreams by creating a portal. They have to be asleep or the portal will not appear.
5. If you want to enter the dream of someone who isn't a Dreamweaver, you must be holding a belonging of theirs (if possible, it's best NOT to choose a stinky sock – trust me) when you fall asleep. In your dream, by focusing on that person, a portal will appear that takes you to their dream.
6. If you want to enter the dream of another Dreamweaver, you must know their symbol and draw it on your hand.
7. If someone wakes up while you're in their dream, you'll wake up too. (And feel cranky the next day!)

I read through the instructions and Neena watches me intently, nodding along.

“And what are those in touch with the spirit world called?” Ameena asks.

I hesitate slightly. There are lots of different types of people in touch with magic: Dreamweavers, like me and Neena; Starreaders like Ameena; and Healers like Neena's grandma, who is watching us from a big leather armchair. Grandma doesn't speak much English but she's mouthing something silently at me.

“Don't give him clues!” Neena giggles.

“It isn't cheating if I don't understand the hints,” I protest.

Grandma starts miming holding a bowl and spoon, blowing on the bowl and taking a sip.

*Soup!*

“Soupsayers! I mean, Soothsayers!” I blurt out.

Grandma claps her hands together and

laughs with a gap-toothed smile.

“It’s hard to believe there are Soothsayers all over the world and they could be anyone...” I wonder aloud. I catch myself looking at the postwoman or the checkout person in the supermarket suspiciously from time to time.

Neena nods in agreement. “I know. But since we have to stay secret, we can only tell people we really trust. You’ve seen what could happen when the wrong people use our powers for evil... There are some places you can be open, though, when you live in a community of Soothsayers, like we did back in Chitral.”

Chitral in Pakistan is Neena’s hometown. She always gets a wistful far-off look in her eyes when she talks about it.

“I feel sad that you’ve only met the three of us,” Neena says, shaking her head as if it’s a great tragedy. “There are so many amazing Dreamweavers and Starreaders and all kinds

of other Soothsayers with different powers.”

I feel the hairs on my arm stand up. “Other types of Soothsayers? Like what?”

“Oh, there are Spellcasters, Spiritlinks...” Neena lists, as if it’s the most casual thing in the world. I want to know more but she’s already moved on. “I wish you could meet my little cousin Faisal! He’s still in Chitral but I was his dreamweaving mentor. He *loves* animals, even the ones other people don’t like. His dreamweaving symbol is a *worm!*”

“A *worm?!!*” I burst out laughing. “And I thought my symbol was funny.”

(I chose the smiley face emoji with its tongue sticking out as my symbol, purely to make Neena laugh!)

“The things toddlers dream about are so funny. Like, once we were in a field of puppies but they all quacked like chickens and laid chocolate eggs!”

Neena sighs and I can tell she’s thinking

of home again. Neena and her family had to flee Chitral to escape a very dangerous Darkweaver, the Bhoot. He's actually Neena's uncle and he's *not* happy that they fled Pakistan. He's been tracking Neena ever since.

"Well, maybe I will meet your worm-loving cousin Faisal one day," I say, trying to banish the worries from my mind. "And all those other amazing Soothsayers. Who knows!"

"Who knows..." Neena agrees, a little sadly.

We pack our study materials away as the old wooden clock on the wall strikes 6 p.m. It's already pitch-black outside; the winter nights have firmly taken over from the long autumn sunsets. I notice Ameena standing at the door that leads to the garden, peering out of the window up at the sky.

"It's a new moon next Wednesday," she says quietly, almost to herself. "I will be

performing a new-moon ritual to read the stars. Tito, why don't you join us?"

I feel a flurry of excitement in my stomach. "I'd love to. Thank you."

Being able to watch Ameena using her star-reading powers will be amazing. I feel slightly nervous, though, as I know the reason Ameena wants to include me.

Since our run-in with the Bhoot, we've all been on high alert. We know he's working with a group of other Soothsayers, an alliance, who want to merge the spirit world with our world. The spirit world is where creatures called jinn live. I met some of them – fairies that the Bhoot had turned freaky by casting a spell on them. They tracked Neena down and would have helped lure her to him if we hadn't broken the spell. I feel a shiver down my spine when I think of what he might have planned next.

"We need to gather as much knowledge

about the Bhoot's plans as possible," Ameena says, still looking up at the darkening sky. "The stars see all. They can help us."

The front doorbell rings, interrupting our thoughts. My mum must be here to pick me up. I pack my Jinnyclopedia away and give Neena a hug goodbye. I can hear Ameena and Mum chatting at the door, but just as I'm about to step into the hallway a big thunderclap rolls through the sky.

"That's strange, there was no mention of a storm on the weather news," Mum says, looking at me. "Come on, let's get home before it starts pouring down. Bye, Ameena, and thanks."

Mum and I drive home as more thunderclaps ring out and a fine rain starts to fall. As we pull into the little car park behind our terraced house I see Rupert, our fluffy

labradoodle, standing at the gate barking.

"What's Rupert doing in the garden?"

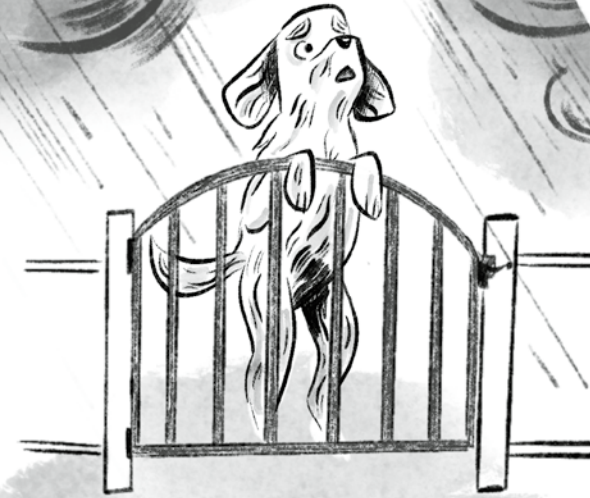
I frown.

"It's raining."

"Mama must be having a kitchen nightmare," Mum says, her eyes wide. "Come on."

Mum was right. When we get inside, the smoke alarm is going off, my baby brother, Roberto, is crying in his highchair and Mama is flapping a tea towel in front of the smoking oven.

"Ah, mio dio, amore, the potatoes are charcoal!" Mama cries out. "Tito, darling,





please stop the dog barking, I cannot take it!”

“OK, Mama,” I say, giving her a quick kiss. Mama is an excellent chef (usually). She teaches cooking at the local college. When something goes wrong in the kitchen, we all know to be extra nice to her. I call Rupert in and stroke him gently to calm him down while Mum picks up Roberto and soothes him.

When Mama has finally stopped flapping the tea towel and the potatoes are out of the oven, we all take a deep breath and look at each other.

“So,” I say, “pizza?”

★

I always feel sleepier in winter when the days are shorter. On frosty evenings, I just want to snuggle in bed in my PJs with a book. In any case, going to sleep is when the real adventures begin.

I settle down under my fluffy duvet with Neena’s dream symbol drawn on my hand. We agreed to meet in her dream tonight to practise my dreamweaving techniques. I drift off thinking of Neena’s warm kitchen and the comforting smell of cinnamon...

And then I open my eyes and I’m on my clifftop. A dream for a Dreamweaver feels just as real as the waking world – only here, there are no limits. Everything is created from my own imagination. From the earth beneath my feet to the smell of salt from the ocean far below.

I call my dreambase Titotown. It’s a huge, grassy cliff overlooking a dark blue sea. The sky is always filled with bright, swirling neon colours, no matter the time of day. Away from the edge of the cliff is a forest so full of thick pine trees and dense shrubbery that you can’t see where it ends. And it’s all my own creation.

Neena says that nobody knows exactly how a Dreamweaver first creates their dreambase. It was just *here* the first night I ever dreamweaved. Since then, I've made some cool additions – like a popcorn machine that never runs out and a treehouse den in the forest. (Though Neena did have to help me with that one.) But where the idea for my clifftop first came from ... that's something I wonder about a lot. I've never been anywhere like it in real life.

But while Titotown is the BEST, I said I'd meet Neena in her dream so it's time to dreamhop. I shake my head to focus and stare at the space in front of me, plant my feet firmly on the ground and hold my hands waist high, palms up. Then I think of Neena in my mind's eye. Her bright green eyes, wavy dark brown hair and oval face. Soon, the air in front of me starts wiggling like the heat haze above a fire and golden

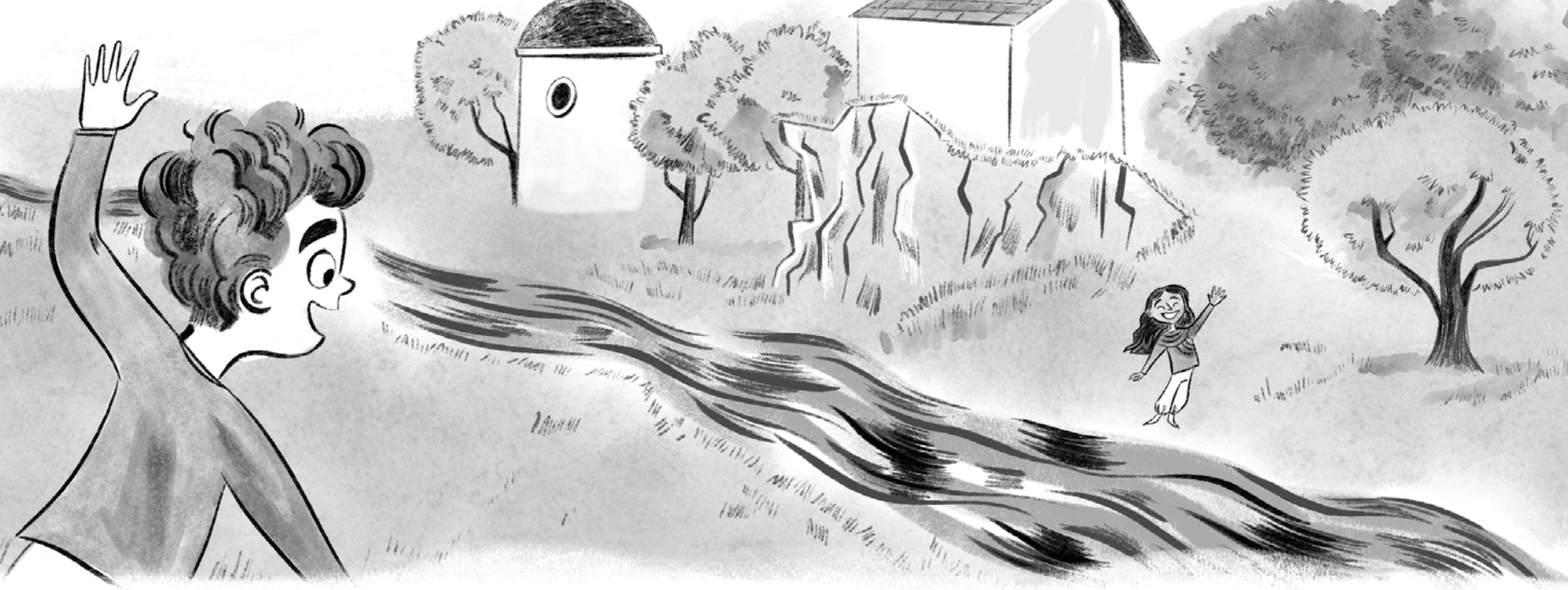
sparks appear, stretching out into a circle. I can't explain what the inside of the portal looks like or feels like. It's just black and nothingy. It's a substance like ink, but one that leaves nothing on your skin. If I'm completely honest, it gives me the creeps. But I'm learning that you can be scared and brave at the same time. Like my mama calls me – “sensitive”.

I step into the void and a few seconds later feel myself being sucked through the portal before landing in Neena's dream. It's a valley in her hometown, Chitral.

“Neeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeena! Where are you?”

A voice calls back, echoing through the valley, “I'm down by the river, to your right.”

I scan the valley below me and spot Neena, a tiny figure by the sparkling water. A tingle of excitement runs through my veins. Time to dreamweave.



“I thought we could continue practising creating organic matter,” Neena says, once I reach her. “You were getting really quick last time!”

I try not to sigh. I *know* I need to learn basic things like creating flowers and rocks but I *really* want to learn something more exciting. Like how to make myself giant or create a herd of tap-dancing elephants or, most of all, how to fly like Neena can. I shake off my attitude and

focus on the task at hand. Like Mum always says, “You have to learn to walk before you can run.” I hold out a hand and concentrate. Creating organic matter, so...

“Is that ... a pepperoni pizza?” Neena giggles.

I nod triumphantly and take a big bite. The cheese is extra stretchy, just how I like it. I hand Neena a slice and she takes a bite but immediately spits it out.



“What’s wrong?”  
I gasp.  
“Um, well ... my slice is made of cardboard.”  
She holds it up and indeed the cheese and pepperoni

are balanced on a piece of soggy cardboard!  
I groan. *How did I mess that up?*

“Don’t worry, Tito, you did really well!”  
Neena reassures me. “It’s all good practice and at least half of the pizza was dough! Here.”

Neena holds her hand out and a huge pizza with all the toppings appears, floating just above her palm and spinning slowly.

I sit down heavily on a tree stump nearby.

“What?” Neena says, narrowing her eyes.  
The pizza pops out of existence.

“It’s just ... you can *fly*, Neena. You can make two big silver wings and flap about in the air!” I say, waving my arms for added effect. “I can’t even make a pizza.”

“I don’t flap, I *glide*.” Neena winks.  
But then she sits next to me and pats my shoulder. “I’ve had more practice than you. That’s all. And you can’t force it. Let it come naturally.”

I nod but I still have a sinking feeling in my stomach. Neena is so powerful that I don’t believe she had to practise *that* hard. But there’s something else I don’t tell her. I don’t want to learn how to fly just because it’s fun. I want to be the strongest Dreamweaver I can be to help protect her.

To protect *everyone* against the Bhoot.