

The Dreamfighter Chronicles

Book Four

The Nowhere Kids

Sometimes the greatest enemy is the one you've forgotten. This time, the Dream Fighters face a lost group, known as the Nowhere Kids. Their anger make them dangerous fighters, ones the Dream Fighters might not be able to overcome. Read on future Dream Fighter...your day is coming.

-Calvin Locke

Chapter 1

Jillian was dreaming again, this much she was sure of. She wasn't at the academy and she wasn't going through a training exercise. She had learned how to tell the difference. Whenever she felt this calm, she knew she was going to that other place, the place where she had met Mary what seemed like so long ago. Jillian stood in the same open field of grass that she first met Mary at. The air was cool and smelled of fresh flowers. The tall oak tree stood as it always did in the middle of the field, looking like it was watching over everything.

It wasn't long before she felt Mary behind her. Jillian smiled. She hadn't seen Mary in a long time. She turned and saw her Great Grandmother, wearing the normal white robes she wore. She had the usual peaceful look on her face.

"Hello," Jillian said, happy to see her.

"Hello Jillian."

"Why am I here?" Jillian asked. She had tried a few times to visit Mary but she found out she could only be brought there. She couldn't go herself.

Mary didn't say anything. Instead, she walked toward the pond near the oak tree, suggesting that Jillian follow her by holding out her hand. Jillian took it, noticing how warm it was, and walked with her to the pond.

Jillian knew the pond was more than just the water she saw in it. Mary had the power to show other worlds in that water. When Danny was fighting alone at the academy, it was through the pond that Mary showed them the danger he was in. Jillian wondered what would happen this time, what she would be shown.

The stopped right at the edge of the pond. Mary looked down. "Close your eyes," she said. Jillian did. Then, it felt as though Jillian was lifted off the ground and thrown toward the pond. She could still feel Mary's hand in hers as she felt herself falling into the water. But she didn't feel water. All she felt was a

little thud, like she had just taken a small jump from one spot to another.

“Open them now.”

Jillian opened her eyes and saw that they were in the middle of a city. Cars raced passed them on the busy street. They were standing on a corner, and Jillian could see that the street to her right went up high in one direction, and low in the other. She’d seen this city on television before. She looked to her left and saw a large bridge.

“San Francisco,” Mary said to her. “You were wondering where we are.”

“I know I saw it before. Why here?”

“Watch,” Mary said, pointing to the bridge.

Everything seemed normal for a while. Cars were going smoothly in both directions on the bridge, going about their business like Jillian suspected they did every day. Then, it happened. It started from the far end of the bridge. It looked like an invisible figure lifted the bridge off the ground and was moving in their direction, taking more and more of the bridge with it. Cars plunged into the water below. Jillian couldn’t believe what she was seeing, such a huge amount of destruction and she wondered why Mary showed it to her.

The figure then took the bridge and hurled it toward the city, sending huge buildings crashing to the ground, destroying everything in sight. The crumbled buildings came toward them but Mary didn’t move. All the concrete and metal passed over them, never touching them. A huge dust cloud swept over it all, making it hard to see.

“Close your eyes again.” Jillian didn’t want to. Tears already were coming down her face and she couldn’t bear to see any more.

She felt air rushing past her face and before long she smelled the flowers in the air again. Without Mary telling her to, she opened her eyes and saw she was in front of the pond again. Now the pond was showing what she had just seen again.

Mary pointed at the scene. “That,” she said, looking directly at Jillian. “You have to stop it.”

Everything was brand new. Braden, Jillian and Jack had watched as the new academy had been built on the very site where the old one had been destroyed only a little more than a year before. It grew out of the ground so fast none of them could believe it. It was surely something to see.

With Sarlak contained after their last battle, and Uncle Johnny retired, Danny was left to run the academy. In some ways he might have been too young, but everyone agreed he was the best choice for the job. He had been their teacher before, and a good one at that, so no one argued when he took the position of Headmaster at the academy.

The battle with Sarlak and his mind-controlled Gorgons had nearly destroyed the Dream Fighters, but they had rallied back, rebuilt their academy, and started training both old and new recruits. Jack was splitting time between the academy and training in the Gorgon Warbird gunships, so he couldn't take on a bigger role at the academy.

His sister, Haley, had enlisted with the Night Angels, a secret group dedicated to saving the lives of those who would do great things in the future. She rarely came to the academy, and then it was just to say hello and see how the rebuilding was coming along.

Braden had been granted a teacher's assistant position because of his ability to Mind Link with a large group of other Fighters and coordinate battles. He was the only one who could use this sort of power with any success and Danny wanted him to work with as many Fighters as possible to make the link stronger.

With these changes came another one that none of the Fighters liked to talk about, the retirement of their teacher and mentor, Uncle Johnny. They had known even Uncle Johnny didn't want to retire but had to. He had no choice. His body and

spirit could no longer take spending so much time in the dream world.

Braden sat in one of the new desks. Where the old academy was all brick and castle-like, this new one was as modern as they came. The outside was round instead of squared off. It was white. The old academy was dreary grey brick. Huge panes of glass rose out of the ground with this new academy. It looked like a big ice sculpture that you would almost expect to be cold to the touch.

Inside, everything was different as well. The long, damp corridors were now shorter and carpeted, so that you couldn't hear trainees walking through the halls. Everything was high-tech, right down to the desk Braden was sitting in. The desk itself was comfortable, and instead of a table to write on, there was a computer screen. From there, A.L.L.I., the Academy Library Learning Intelligence computer, could teach her lesson to each student individually. Uncle Johnny had created Allie, and she was a great computer system, if not always the best teacher. With the old Headmaster gone along with Uncle Johnny, there was no one left to teach the older stuff.

Allie moved across the screen. She changed her appearance depending on what she was teaching. When she taught science, she might make herself look like Albert Einstein. History usually brought Ben Franklin into the room, and she once or twice made herself look like Uncle Johnny when teaching fighting technique. None of the fighters knew how they really felt about that. It was tough to see him there without it actually being him.

Jillian still had the dream from the night before on her mind but she didn't know how to bring it up or who to talk to about it. Everyone had been in such a good mood lately. The academy had finally been finished and Sarlak had been defeated. These were supposed to be good times for all. If she started taking about another danger, that would bring everyone down. Still, she knew she had no choice. Mary had never told her something that wasn't true.

Braden played with his desk, tapping certain areas to bring up information, like what other classes were doing right then. He

was most concerned about who was playing Speedball. He liked that part of the training the most and looked forward to playing. He hadn't played since the new academy was built. There were some new recruits and he enjoyed challenging them. Some were pretty good. Playing Speedball sure beat sitting in class.

"Sir Braden," Allie said to him, "I do apologize if this information is not up to your usual exciting standards, but all future rulers of the free world need to know this." Allie was sarcastic a lot. It was what Braden liked about her the most.

"I know all about the past battles with Sarlak. Besides, we beat him, so why do we need to learn?"

Allie transformed herself from the female teacher she was to a tall man with thin white hair and a dark moustache. "Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it," she said, in a Spanish accent.

"Who are you supposed to be?" Braden asked.

"George Santanya. He was a philosopher and writer. He also said 'The wisest mind has something yet to learn.' I can't imagine who could use that advice."

"Okay, I get it."

"I am glad you do. And so sorry to bore you." Allie changed back to her regular image, of a female schoolteacher. "Now, you all know of the legendary battles with Sarlak and the Gorgons. Even though the Dream Fighters had never really faced Sarlak head on, we always knew we was working in the background, and every Fighter that ever served has fought against him in one way or another. There were, however, other enemies throughout the ages. Today, I am going to show you the battle against the Zyrvies, an ancient race of warriors who attacked an ally of ours and entered us into one of the biggest battles we ever fought."

"Who are the Zyrvies?" Cal asked. He was sitting in the back, and had been quiet like he usually was. Next to him was his twin sister, Terry. They had come to the academy together

and weren't ever seen apart. Terry usually did most of the talking.

"I was about to tell you. The Zyrvies live in a galaxy right next to ours. We made our first contact by accident, actually. While searching for life outside our galaxy, Academy scientists had sent radio waves in all directions. We activated one of their scout satellites and the next thing we knew, the Zyrvie fleet was at our doorstep. We negotiated our way out of that one but we all knew it wouldn't be long before we'd hear from them again."

"How many other alien races are there?" Jack asked.

"There is no way to know. We can guess there are thousands, just judging by how many galaxies there are, and that is just in the known universe. Some people think there are thousands of universes as well. So, let's just say there could be a lot."

"It seems most of them aren't friendly," Braden said, more to himself than to the class but Allie heard him.

"Really? You forget the Andrens, the Cllophs, the Wikunds, Fests, Krikuks, Fellowes, and now, once again, the Gorgons, I presume, just to name a few."

"It just seems there are just as many that don't like us."

Allie sighed. "Yes, this might be true. Understand that there will always be friends and enemies, good and bad, right and wrong. Deciding what is what isn't easy, and many times misunderstandings get in the way. Beings are always quick to fight without thinking things through. For instance, humans are probably the worst with this."

"That's not true," Terry said, a little bit of anger in her voice. "Humans are good. We try to help."

"Really," Allie said. "Look at it this way. Who is a fish's predator?"

“What’s a predator?” Jillian asked, trying to forget about her dream for a moment.

“A predator is one that hunts another, usually for food but not always.”

“A shark could be a fish’s predator then,” Jack said.

“Yes. And who is a gazelle’s predator?”

“A lion?” Braden asked.

“Very good.”

“And what about humans? On earth at least.”

No one answered.

“You’re all right, there is no other animal that is a human’s predator. Some say they are their own, and if that’s the case, it is because they get angry and act quickly without thinking. So, if we do that to themselves, what do you think is our reaction to other beings?”

“Are you saying we attack them?”

“It’s not easy to say,” Allie said. “After all, most humans don’t come to this realm, and the ones that do usually are not like everyone else. But imagine if the people of the real world knew about this one, knew about the existence of other species? Do you think they would act nicely?” No one answered right away because they weren’t sure what the answer was.

“I would hope they would,” Jillian said.

“Hope is one thing, sweetie, reality is another. That’s why what we do here is so important. We need to protect everyone and build relationships, getting ready for the day when everyone will be prepared to know the truth and not freak out about it.”

“Good luck,” Cal said.

“We’re going to need it,” Allie replied. “Now, after our first contact with the Zyrvies, there was peace. Then, out of nowhere,

they attacked the Wikund training station, not far from here. The Wikunds are friends with everyone, so it was clear the Zyrvies were sending a message to us, that they didn't like us and that they wanted to go to war. We tried to talk it through but talk didn't work. So, we sent agents to try to work things out. This video is of what happened when our team arrived."

Everyone's desk showed the video, which was a little dark. They could see three Dream Fighters in their long robes, entering a small building that looked to be made of glass. It wasn't clear glass, but instead frosted glass, so you couldn't see inside. One of the fighters turned and looked at the camera. Everyone recognized it as a younger Uncle Johnny. Braden noticed he had longer hair and decided to bring that up to him the next time he saw him. He enjoyed making fun of Uncle Johnny and the bad hair and outfits he sported over the years.

"We are about to enter the Zyrvie HQ. It doesn't look like they have spotted us. Hopefully we can meet with their King and put an end to this," Uncle Johnny said. Jillian figured he looked like he was about 16 or 17. It was funny to see him at that age.

The door to the building slid up to open, and waiting for the three Fighters were what looked like ten Zyrvie Warriors. They were tall but very skinny, with long, skinny arms to match. Their armor looked like frosted glass as well, and they carried matching swords. Each had long blond hair that was so light it looked white.

One of the other Fighters screamed something at the Zyrvies, it sounded like a girl's voice telling them to hold off, but they didn't answer. All three of the fighters drew their energy swords. Whether they wanted to fight or not, they had no choice. The Zyrvies didn't look like they were going to back down. The

Zyrvies did attack, in a five by five formation, but the Fighters were ready.

The Fighters in the classroom were dazzled by the swordfight. Uncle Johnny led the charge, moving his sword so fast it was nothing but a blur. He slashed left and right, pushing forward and keeping the enemy on their heels, preventing them from moving forward. Jack remembered that Uncle Johnny always said the best defense was a good offense.

The Zyrvies fought back pretty well, and the Fighters in the classroom were surprised to see that the Zyrvies had powers like theirs. One had launched energy blasts at Uncle Johnny and his team. Instead of purple, like Braden's, these were dark blue, and they left big holes in the ground where they hit. Explosions tore the ground in several areas but the Fighters did not retreat. Instead, they held their ground, actually moving forward.

Each Zyrvie also had a shield that covered them from head to toe, also made out of energy. Uncle Johnny's sword bounced off them, and it was only a rare shot that made it through. The sound of energy blasts and sword strikes vibrated through the small speakers on each desk. It didn't look like Uncle Johnny had any chance of winning this battle. All the speed and all the power he seemed to have appeared useless.

He yelled 'Now!'" to one of the Fighter's behind him, who hadn't done any fighting yet. This fighter pulled his hood off, revealing dark blonde hair. The kids in the class could see him from the side. He looked to be about the same age as Uncle Johnny, with a paler face and pointier nose. After pulling off his hood, his eyes glowed a deep red. He raised his hands and in one quick motion, brought them together. A rumbling came from the speakers and in a flash, all the Zyrvies had lost their shields.

Uncle Johnny drew closer to them, as did the other Fighter with him, who turned out to be a girl, maybe a year or so younger, with long, flowing red hair. They chased the Zyrvies into the building, and the camera went dead.

“Wow,” Braden said. “Who was that?”

“Which do you mean?” Allie asked.

“Well, I *know* my uncle. The other guy, the one with the red eyes, who was he?”

“That was Xavier. He was a great Fighter in his day, and a great friend of your Uncle. They worked as a team for years.”

“What happened to him, did he retire?”

“We are not here to discuss what happened to Xavier.”

“You won’t tell us?” Jack asked. He too was amazed by Xavier’s power, mainly because he had done something similar to his sister’s energy sword a year before. He was under Sarlak’s control then, and he wondered if he could ever really use that power again. To see this Xavier do it made Jack excited that he might be able to control that power fully once again, without having to be under Sarlak’s control.

“It’s not important. Dream Fighters don’t stay Fighters for long, you know that, and we are really not supposed to discuss them once they are gone.”

“But we talk about Uncle Johnny all the time,” Braden said.

“That’s different. He was a special case and he already said it was okay before he retired.”

“So Xavier did retire,” Jack said.

“Anyway,” Allie said, trying to change the topic. “It’s more important we talk about his power than about why and how he left.”

“What about the girl?” Jillian asked.

“She’s not important either.”

“What happened to her?”

“You guys really don’t listen too well, do you?”

“Okay, we’ll stop asking,” Braden said. He was already working on finding out the answers to their questions. Not long after they had started working on their desks, he created a back door into the Academy archives with Jack, who was an electronics expert. He could access things on the computer without even Allie knowing. He had gotten caught in class earlier so that she wouldn’t suspect he had a secret method. He let himself get caught doing little things to cover the big things he was doing in secret.

Braden tapped away, taking an image from the video he had just seen. Information about Xavier came up, and it showed he had been a very good Dream Fighter, working his way up in rank to the title of Lord, as Uncle Johnny had. He led brigades of Fighters into many battles. He also saw that Xavier had gotten into trouble a few times, but it seemed like small stuff. Then, the file just ended, with no way of knowing what had happened to him. Braden decided he would look deeper.

The image of the girl fighter pulled up a file that said ‘Classified’. Braden went to work on opening it. He didn’t get very far. All he could see was one page of the file. And even when he got that, all he could see was one word, ‘Terminated.’ This search was going to take some work.

Chapter 2

The kid batting never hit the ball well. Jack had played against him a few times and he usually popped up or grounded out. Jack played left field, a position he didn't play much but the coach was letting everyone play everywhere. He didn't mind left field; it was a lot better than playing right, but he liked pitching or playing shortstop best. Shortstop is where they put the best players, that's what someone had told him. He wanted to be the best player. Some of his teammates said he was. Actually most of them did, except for Jason and his friend. Jason wanted to be called the best.

Jack had only gotten one ball hit to him in left, and when he saw the short kid step up to the plate, he moved closer to the

infield, hoping to get a short fly ball he could run down. He was practically on the edge of the outfield grass when the boy took a wild swing and cracked the ball toward him. The ball headed way over Jack's head, and he raced back toward it. They were only winning by one run, so if this ball landed the other team would probably win. He couldn't let that happen.

Because he wanted to win so bad he had forgotten about one of the biggest rules they were given at the academy: never use your powers in the real world. At first they were told they wouldn't be able to use them in real life but they had found out that wasn't true. They *could* use their powers in the real world, but they shouldn't. It was dangerous, they were told. If the wrong people found out about them, something bad could happen.

Jack didn't think about that, he only thought about running that fly ball down and winning the game. He had the power of super speed. He could run so fast you couldn't even see his legs moving. He didn't run that fast after the fly ball, but he moved faster than a boy his age should be able to. In what seemed like a flash, he was underneath the fly ball and made the catch, jumping in the air in excitement after doing so.

Luckily for him, no one from the academy was there. He was also way out there in left field, so the people in the stands and in the dugout and on the field really couldn't tell that he moved so fast. It only looked like another amazing play that some kid luckily made. Jack was pretty sure no one would ask any questions and no one from the academy was going to find out. At least, that was what he hoped.

He raced toward the dugout, still holding the ball in the air, though he made sure not to race too fast. One mistake was okay but to do it again just wouldn't be smart. He knew that much. He

was happy this was one game Haley didn't come to. She had become pretty busy with her new training. From what she told him, it seemed harder than what she had gone through in the academy. Jack thought the academy has hard enough.

His father was waiting for him in the dugout. He patted him on the head and said, "Nice catch, buddy. Didn't know you could move so fast."

"Neither did I," Jack answered. He didn't like not telling his father the truth but they had been told from the beginning never to tell anyone in the real world of their training, not even their parents. Jack didn't like it but he knew it made sense. If he did tell his father, he was pretty sure he would just think he was nuts.

"Well, good job. We needed this game today."

"Thanks, Dad," Jack said. His father went on the field to congratulate the other team and to shake the hand of the other coach, something he made sure to do after every game. Jack started to put his equipment into his bag. He was alone at the end of the dugout. A few of his teammates came over and patted him on the back.

Jack finished putting his gear into his bag and zipped it up. He turned around to walk toward his father. When he looked up, he saw a tall, older man with a white beard standing before him. He was chubby, and wore a dark suit and tie.

"That was impressive," the man said, in a deep, booming voice with a British accent. He smiled at Jack.

"My catch?" Jack asked.

"Well, son, I wasn't talking about how you popped up with a man on third and no one out in the fourth inning. Yes, your catch. That took talent."

“I just got lucky,” Jack said, not wanting to talk about how he made the catch.

“You might think so. But what I saw was an incredible ability. Are you sure you have never done anything like that before?” the man asked, looking over his black rimmed glasses at Jack.

“No, I haven’t.”

“Hmm, interesting,” the old man said. He took a pipe from his jacket pocket and put it in his mouth. No smoke came out of it, but Jack could smell the cherry tobacco. “I’ve never seen any one run that fast before, let alone a nine-year-old boy.”

“I am ten.”

The man chuckled. “My deepest apologies. There is quite a difference between nine and ten.”

“Who are you?”

“No one important. My name is Doctor Zemora. I study many things, and athletic ability is just one of them. You have yourself a nice day.”

With that, Dr. Zemora turned and walked away. Jack felt nervous. Had the doctor noticed he had used his ability, something he was never supposed to do in the real world? He was pretty sure no one could now, definitely someone as old as the doctor, but it still didn’t make him feel any better. Danny was surely going to be upset with him if he found out about this.

“Who was that?” Jack’s father asked.

“Some man who just wanted to tell me I made a good catch,” Jack answered, trying to make sure he didn’t make it seem like something was wrong.

Jack’s father laughed. “Oh boy, you getting fans now? That head of yours is going to get bigger.”

“It was nothing like that,” Jack said. And if it wasn’t, then what was it? Why did Doctor Zemora come over and talk to him? Jack wished there was someone he could tell about this, but he

couldn't take the chance. It looked like he was going to be in trouble one way or the other. It was a feeling he had gotten used to pretty early in his life.

Jillian twirled the spaghetti on her fork, twisting it around the plate in a circular motion. She had tried to eat, at least enough so her parents wouldn't think anything was wrong, but every time she put some in her mouth she felt like she couldn't swallow, like there was something in her throat that would block it. She kept trying—to make it look good—but she knew she wasn't doing a good job. Her mother kept watching her out of the corner of her eye. Every time she felt her mother's eyes on her, she brought the fork to her mouth and tried to stuff a little more in.

“Are you okay honey?” her mother, Aunt Lisa, asked. “You aren't feeling sick, are you?”

There was the trap. Sure, she could easily tell her mother that she didn't feel well. She had to be careful, though. Faking sick could get her out of school the next day but she could also end up in the doctor's office. It was a fine line that Jillian had unfortunately crossed too many times by accident and she didn't want to do it then. She had enough to worry about without having to sit in some stupid doctor's office with a thermometer in her mouth.

“I'm okay,” Jillian said, trying to take the worry out of her voice.

Her father, Uncle Michael, leaned toward her. “Are you sure? You look pale.”

“I'm fine.”

Uncle Michael put the back of his hand on her forehead. “You don't feel warm.”

“Because I am fine,” she said, noticing a little anger in her voice. “I am just tired,” she came back with quickly. “We did a lot of running today in gym.”

“I don't know why they work you guys so hard sometimes,” Aunt Lisa said. “I have been meaning to speak to Mr. Silverman for a while now. Maybe it is time I do.”

Nothing could be worse than that, Jillian figured. It was bad enough to have a parent come down to school but they hadn't done *any* running in gym so Jillian would have been caught in a lie as well. This was getting worse, she thought.

"No, it wasn't that much running. It just felt that way because I didn't sleep too good last night."

"Why not?" Uncle Michael asked.

"Nightmare," Jillian said, feeling better that at least she was telling part of the truth. She didn't like the whole lying part about being a Dream Fighter, but even Aunt Samantha had said that was what all Fighters did. And if that was the case, then Jillian's mother had lied to her parents too, because she had no choice.

Still, Jillian hated lying.

What Jillian did notice was that Braden had been quiet during all of this. Normally, he had something to add to the conversation. She wondered what was keeping him eating his food instead of throwing in a comment.

"What was it about?"

Jillian took a deep breath. She could tell the whole truth and no one would think it was anything more than a dream. It was that unbelievable to begin with. "Well, this woman took me to this city and showed me this big bridge that lifted up off the ground..." Jillian noticed the look on her parents' faces and realized they didn't like this very much. She had to be careful. "So I raised my hands in the air and I made the bridge go back to the ground and everyone was okay."

"Really," Aunt Lisa said.

"That doesn't sound much like a nightmare," Braden said, breaking his silence.

"Well, that was the cool part. Then some monster chased after me because he wanted to steal my power. It felt like he chased me the whole night. I kept waking up and every time I went back to sleep, he was there." Jillian was mad at Braden for making her lie again but she figured he didn't know what he did so it wasn't his fault. She was still a little mad though.

“What did the monster look like?” he asked her, and she could almost tell from the sound of his voice that he was doing it on purpose, making her create something that wasn’t real, making her lie. She put her fork down and leaned back in her seat. She took another deep breath to relax, like her mother had taught her. Sometimes it worked real well and the there were times like this one where it didn’t help at all.

“He was big and ugly and had bad breath.”

“That’s all? Anything else?”

“He was hairy.”

“Most monsters are. What was so scary about this one that kept you up all night?”

“He had a nametag on.”

“Really?” Uncle Michael asked. “What was his name?”

“Braden,” Jillian said, amused that she had come up with that.

“Yeah, you better be scared if I am a monster and coming after you.”

Jillian didn’t know why Braden was being so difficult. He didn’t do that too often; especially after they both became Dream Fighters. Maybe something bothered him too that he didn’t talk about.

“If it really was you, I could stop you.”

“No you couldn’t.”

“Could too. I know some things you don’t.”

Braden laughed. “Yeah, okay little girl.”

“Enough,” Aunt Lisa said.

“Jillian, if you are tired, maybe you should go to bed.”

“But it’s only six,” Jillian said.

“And you said you are tired. You’re excused from the table if you want so you can go to bed.”

“No Momma, I am okay.”

“Well, you sound like you are a little cranky. And so do you, Braden. Maybe both of you should go to bed early tonight.”

“But I was supposed to be able to play video games tonight.”

“That would be tough to do if you are tired,” Uncle Michael said.

“I’m okay.”

“And you Jillian?”

“I’m fine.”

“That’s better,” Aunt Lisa said. “I’d hate for you both to have to go to bed and miss the special dessert I made.” Jillian wondered why, if her mother really didn’t want her to miss the special dessert, that she was ready to send her to bed without it. Sometimes grownups made no sense. When she thought about it, she realized they rarely did.

And they didn’t have to worry about saving a city like she did.

Danny exhaled slowly. He tried to not think about all the responsibility he had since he became the leader of the academy. He didn’t mind taking over but he never thought it would be as tough as it was. He had to lead the rebuilding of the academy and the recruiting of new Dream Fighters, something Uncle Johnny and Kal had done. Now, Uncle Johnny was retired, and Kal had turned out to be Sarlak and was contained somewhere in the basement where the new academy stood. On top of that, Danny had to direct all training that went on. The only help he had was Allie, and there were times when she seemed she wasn’t in the mood to help at all.

He worked harder on his meditation technique. He’d learned everything about the dream world pretty quickly, but the meditation part he wasn’t so good at. Uncle Johnny had told him that he didn’t have enough patience and Danny knew that was the problem. He liked to act, to fix things as soon as he could so sitting and breathing and thinking really didn’t make much sense to him. Uncle Johnny said that was part of Danny’s problem. Not all things could be fixed by doing something. Sometimes things needed to be thought through, and even sometimes it was better to do nothing at all than act just for the sake of acting.

By concentrating as hard as he could, he entered his meditation. Lately, Danny had been having visions but they weren't clear. Constantly, he saw images of people, of kids calling out to him. He wanted to go to them, to find out who they were but something said to avoid them. He felt danger in his meditations and he followed that because he had been taught to trust it. They called his name, these kids, but they did so in a teasing way, like they wanted him to come only so they could do something to him.

This time, he didn't sense them. Instead he saw his cousin, Jillian, standing in the dusty field outside the academy where they had trained and also fought all of their battles against the Gorgons. She just stood there, looking at him as if she were asking him to do something but wouldn't tell him what it is.

Danny followed the vision further, sensing some form of danger nearby but it seemed as though it were hidden, that it had been hiding for some time. He looked around the dusty field but couldn't see anything. He saw Jillian again and she pointed behind him. He spun around and saw an army of enemies coming at him. He couldn't make out any of their faces. They looked like kids, normal kids, racing toward him. He could sense the anger in them, anger they wanted to take out on him.

He took another deep breath, doing his best to try and stay calm. *This is a vision*, he told himself, yet he couldn't stop his heart from beating way faster than it should. He called on all his energy, his fingertips crackling with purple sparks of energy. He pulled energy from the nearby academy, like he had not long ago. He didn't know what the vision was trying to tell him but he felt the need to make sure he was prepared for whatever happened.

The small army of kids kept coming. Danny raised his arms and sent to energy blasts toward them. Both crashed into the ground on either side of them. They were warning shots but they didn't stop them. If anything, it seemed like it made them run faster. Danny prepared his next attack. Because he didn't know

who these kids were, he wanted to make sure he didn't hurt them unless he had to.

The kids immediately stopped. They all pulled out energy swords like the one he used. They were all different colors and they glowed like a rainbow against the bright blue sky above and light sand below. They didn't come any closer though. It seemed to Danny that they just wanted to let him know they had the swords and could use them at any time. He looked at Jillian, and she shook her head. He couldn't figure out why she did that. What was she trying to tell him?

Danny didn't want to be the first to attack, but he was facing at least twenty fighters with swords. If nothing else, he had to try to scare them away. He drew his energy sword and held it in front of him with his right hand. With his left he formed an energy blast. He did it differently this time. After learning how to control more energy when he fought Sarlak, he now knew he could set up more than one energy blast at a time and he could send them one after the other at this group of enemies, hoping that would send them away.

The whole time he prepared he tried to think of why he was having this vision. He knew it wasn't real. This came from his own mind, he figured. Still, it meant something. There was a reason for it. He focused his mind on the vision even more, trying his best to forget everything else. Again he felt like something or someone was waiting for him. He just couldn't figure out what or who.

The enemy army just stood there, even as the energy blasts at his fist glowed so strong. He thought they were just going to sit there and take it until one of them shot a fireball in his direction that he had to avoid. After that, a few more sent different attacks at him. One sent a sonic boom, a blast of sound he could feel on his face when it reached him. It almost knocked him down. Another sent an energy blast, this one blue instead of the usual purple or silver. The last attack was just pure light that nearly blinded him. So, he realized he wouldn't be the first to attack. Still he felt like attacking them was wrong.

Then, something changed. The army lowered their swords to their sides. A wind blew, kicking up dust that went directly into Danny's eyes but he was able to fight it off and see clearly. He swept away his long blonde hair from his eyes and put both of his hands on his sword, ready for what he figured was the attack coming.

It never did. Instead, he saw a shadowy figure come from behind the army. He seemed taller and older than the rest of them. Danny readied himself for a fight he was sure was going to happen. He gripped his energy sword tight, ready for a full attack. The figure came a little closer, then stopped.

Danny wanted to say something to the figure, to find out who it was but he figured it wouldn't talk. The figure in the cloak raised a hand, and Danny's energy sword went dead. Then, with the other hand, the figure pushed forward, and Danny fell to the ground with a strong force.

Normally, he would levitate back up but when he tried it didn't work. He pushed himself up off the ground and got to his feet. He looked for Jillian, remembering she was there and hoping she was okay. There was no sign of her. It was like she disappeared. He turned again toward the shadowy figure and noticed it had taken its hood off. Danny tried to see its face but he couldn't. It was like someone was trying to block what he could see.

The figure raised another hand and lifted Danny off the ground and sent him crashing back down about fifty feet behind him. Danny had fought the best of the best in the short time he had been a Fighter, or so he thought. Whoever this was, they were far more powerful than anyone he had ever fought or even heard of. He tried to think of a way to combat this person, a strategy that could help him win. He never got the chance.

Danny woke up from his meditation, worried of what the vision he had seen meant. He had been taught that every vision meant something, every one had a purpose. For this one he wasn't sure, but whatever it was, it couldn't be good.

Chapter 3

Jillian didn't want to fall asleep. For the first time she could remember, she was afraid of sleep, afraid to dream. Since she had been a Dream Fighter, she always looked forward to sleeping. Now, after that vision, she was scared she would see something else bad and really didn't want to.

She turned on her side, her eyes wide open. The clock on her nightstand told her it was 12AM, way past her bedtime. She had to get up in a little over six hours. She didn't know how she was going to do it.

Then, she saw her door open a crack. She shifted over to her other side, thinking it was one of her parents and trying to fake like she was sleeping. She didn't want to get into trouble again, even though she knew she wasn't doing anything wrong. Sometimes, that didn't stop her from getting into trouble. Actually, she could remember a few times where she had done something *right* and had found her way into trouble.

"You're awake, aren't you?" she heard Braden ask. Maybe he was having trouble sleeping as well.

"Yes," she whispered. "What are you doing here?" She was still a little mad at him for what he did at the dinner table.

"Something's wrong, what is it?" he asked, taking a seat at the end of her bed.

"I'm fine."

"Uh huh. You said that at dinner and I didn't buy it then. I was at the academy before and you weren't there. Everyone wants to know where you are. I had to lie and say you weren't feeling too good. Maybe that's the truth."

"I'm okay," Jillian said, not knowing what else to say. She wasn't sure if she should tell Braden. Then again, Mary never said not to tell anyone. She just said Jillian had to stop that horrible thing from happening. Maybe Braden could help. Maybe

he was supposed to. Uncle Johnny always talked about them working together.

“You said that a second ago. Try something else.”

“I really did have a nightmare last night.”

“The one with the monster?”

Jillian sat up and shook her head. “There was no monster. It was something invisible that broke the bridge. I couldn’t see it. It lifted the bridge out of the ground and crashed it into the buildings in the city.” Jillian looked at Braden to see if he believed her. She couldn’t tell if he did or didn’t. It was always tough with him.

“Okay,” he said. “Was anyone with you?”

“Mary was the one who showed it to me. But no one else was there.”

“So it wasn’t a nightmare then. It was real.”

“It wasn’t real. She just showed it to me.”

“Did she say anything?”

Now Jillian was nervous. Should she tell Braden everything? It was too late to turn back, she figured. “She showed it to me, and then said I had to stop it.”

“*You* have to stop it, like by yourself? Without us?” Braden seemed upset about that.

“She didn’t say. I don’t know. I don’t even know if I was supposed to tell you.”

“We are supposed to work together.”

“I know that. But why didn’t she tell everyone else? She only told me.”

“I guess because you are the one she always tells things to. She probably thought you would tell us about it.” Braden thought for a moment. “Do you know where it was, where the bridge was?”

“She said San Francisco.”

“All the way in California? How are we supposed to get there to stop something? That can’t be right. You must have it confused with something else.”

“What else sounds like San Francisco? I don’t know a lot of cities. And I don’t know one that sounds like that.”

Braden agreed. Still, California was far away. Something about Jillian’s vision had to be wrong, but he couldn’t figure out what. “Did she say when?”

“No. She just showed it to me and told me I have to stop it. Maybe she will come to me again and tell me when.”

“Then you should go to sleep,” Braden said, standing up and getting ready to leave.

“No, I am scared.”

“Scared of what?”

“Of having another vision.”

Braden chuckled. “Jilly, you fought against huge Gorgons. You saw something terrible happen to Uncle Johnny in a vision. Why would you be scared?”

“I don’t know. I just am.”

Braden came back over to the bed. “Ok, tell you what. I will stay here until you fall asleep. If you have any bad visions, just think of me. You know you can make me appear anywhere you want. Just do that and you should be okay. How’s that?”

Jillian nodded. “Okay. Thanks.”

“That’s what big brothers are for,” Braden said and he sat back down on the bed.

Jillian didn’t dream of anything else that night. She felt good about it but Braden wondered if maybe she should have dreamt, and didn’t because she was scared. There was something they were supposed to stop. He was sure she was meant to tell everyone.

He sat at his desk, barely paying attention to what Allie was talking about. He wanted to do more research on this Xavier guy but there wasn’t much he could do from his desk. He needed to access the main terminal, and he had to do it without Allie catching him.

He wondered why she didn’t want them to know about the people Uncle Johnny fought with. They were part of the academy

past, of its history. It was something they should study. Instead, she was teaching them about history of the real world, stuff that put him to sleep at school. It was doing the same to him at the academy as well.

His chair buzzed, stinging him with a minor shock. He sat up straight in his chair. He didn't like when Allie did that, but he knew she did it all the time. From what he could tell, she liked it.

“Sorry to disturb you, but I thought that someone who thinks they are going to be a battlefield leader should pay attention to this,” Allie said. Her image on the screen was now of some old guy in a military uniform, some general or something.

“This stuff happened so long ago,” he said.

“To you, maybe. But it was only 60 years ago. Are you saying that it isn't important to know what happened before you?”

“But this is a real world army battle,” Jack said, helping Braden out. “We fight with powers and different weapons. And a lot of times we look for ways not to fight. These guys never did that.”

“Okay, so you are both know-it-alls. Not that it surprises me. Anyway, we are talking about World War II. Tell me this if you two are so smart, how many years were there between World War II and Napoleon?” Allie asked, her voice a deep male one.

Jack tried to use his desk to find the answer but Allie blocked him. Braden wasn't even trying because he really had never heard of Napoleon.

“Do you not know?”

Jillian raised her hand. “Who is Napoleon?”

“Well, that's good. If you don't know, ask. He was a French Emperor who wanted to take over all of Europe. He was considered one of the brightest military minds of his time, if not the brightest. And to answer my own question, it was over 100 years. So, do the Germans, who also wanted to take over Europe in World War II, have anything to learn from someone that far behind him?”

“No,” Braden said. “He fought with different weapons than someone from that long ago.”

“You’re wrong. Napoleon lost his attempt to take over Europe because he invaded Russia in the winter and his troops froze and couldn’t get supplies. The German army made the same mistake over 100 years later. Maybe if the Germans had paid more attention to the failure of Napoleon, they wouldn’t have lost. Of course, we are happy they did. I am only making a point.”

“So, you’re saying I should pay attention to this World War II stuff because I might learn something?”

Braden asked.

“You got it. It’s like what I said yesterday. If you don’t know history, there’s a good chance you might make mistakes you could avoid. It’s just like listening to your parents as you grow up. They might be different than you and seem old, but they probably made mistakes at your age that they can help you avoid. Get it?” Allie asked. She now was back to her usual female image. Jillian wondered why she always chose that image. She was a computer. She also wondered why Allie was a she and not a he. No one ever explained that one to her.

“So I am supposed to learn from this that I need to make sure I am not making a mistake that someone else has made before?” Braden asked.

“That’s a simple way of putting it, yes. And you all need to learn it. None of you are a battlefield commander yet and there is no way to know which one of you will be. It could be any one of you.”

“Okay,” Jack said. “But that’s all we are supposed to learn?”

“It’s a good place to start. There is more to the story, of course. But let’s move forward to some of the academy battles, like the one I showed you yesterday during the Zyrvie War. I showed you what happened when your Uncle was sent on a peace mission. That incident started the Zyrvie War.”

“Did he make a mistake going?” Braden asked.

“I don’t think so,” Allie said. “They had to try to make peace before going into battle. Sometimes the best thing to do is try to avoid battle, as I know you all have been taught. It’s true. Fighting isn’t always the answer.”

“And sometimes it is the only answer,” Terry said from the back of the classroom. “Some enemies don’t understand anything else.”

“You are right, Terry. Some enemies do not know anything but fighting, but that doesn’t mean you can’t try to talk to them, try to avoid fighting.”

“But if someone already tried that in the past, wouldn’t you be repeating their mistake by doing it again? Like, if we ever got into trouble with the Zyrvies again and we sent someone to try to make peace with them?” Cal asked.

“You ask a good question, and the only correct answer is that you have to think about that when it happens. There is no right way to handle these things because not everything is as it originally seems and you have to take things on a case by case basis.” Allie moved back and forth on their computer desks as she spoke, as well as appearing as a hologram in front of the class. Braden noticed this. He wondered why she did that, since most of the students looked down at their desks the whole time.

“Is that just for when we are deciding to go to battle or not, or should we think that way when we are in battle as well?” Jack asked.

“I think it is always good to think before you do anything, but once you have committed yourself to battle, whether it be in a large fight or one on one, you cannot do anything to slow yourself down. That is just too much of a risk, and not one I would want you to take. I wish I could tell all of you that the answers are out there and they are always clear but that is just not true. You have to trust yourself and those around you. Use the information you learn here to help you make tough decisions, as I believe you will have to do in your futures.”

Jillian wondered if that meant her future too and preventing the disaster she had seen. If so, what was she supposed to think

about? The obvious thing was to do whatever she could to prevent it from happening. Maybe there was a way to go about it that she didn't know about yet. She hoped she'd learn about it soon.

Braden tried again to access some files on the network but he noticed there was a firewall up preventing him access. In the Dream World, he had the ability to enter others' minds and send them messages or make them use their powers. He didn't want to force Jack to access the network because it was too risky to do in front of everyone, so instead he sent him a message.

"I need to get past the firewall they have up on the network," he thought to himself and Jack through his mind link.

Braden noticed Jack look at him, so he knew the message got through. "Why?" Jack asked back.

"Don't you want to know about Xavier and the Zyrvie attack?"

"Yes," Jack said. "But Allie told us we don't need to know. Maybe there is a reason."

"That's all the more reason for us to find out. It's probably something very important. We should know."

"I'm not sure. We could get into trouble if we got caught doing something like that."

"Tell me something that is worth doing that wouldn't get us in trouble. And besides, you're so good at this that you won't get caught so there is nothing to worry about."

Jack didn't answer back right away. Braden could sense his cousin doing some serious thinking, which to him meant that he had probably done a good job of convincing him to go along.

"You want to do it right here?" Jack asked. Braden could tell he was a little worried. He might have been able to get his cousin to do it right there but there was really no reason to.

"No, later, when we have some free time. This way, we don't have as good of a chance of getting caught."

"I'll think about it," Jack said, and Braden knew he had him. It wasn't like he was trying to make him do something that was really bad. It probably would be good for the Fighters to know

about Xavier, and maybe even find out a little bit about the girl that fought with him and Uncle Johnny.

Allie kept talking, now onto the topic of the Zyrvie War, which interested Braden more than talking about the older history. After the first battle, the academy sent a larger force to fight the Zyrvie army. The war went on for two years. The academy lost a lot of good fighters, as did the Zyrvies. Allie didn't mention how often Xavier's power was used. Braden wondered what it would be like to use Xavier's power through the mind link, being able to have it used across long distances. It seemed like that would make it easy to win almost any battle. He liked the idea of that.

“What I am about to show you is the final battle of the Zyrvie War. Having gone on for over two years, the leaders of the academy had decided it was time to end it. They had tried to fight a careful war, trying to limit the losses, but the Zyrvies refused to give up. They kept trying to move forward and all the Fighters could do was stop them from doing so, but they were never able to drive them back.

“All of the battles were fought on neutral ground. The leaders of the academy decided it was time to take the war to Zyrvie soil. They had discovered that all Zyrvie warriors were controlled by a central leader, almost like a battle brain. They were all linked.”

Braden raised his hand.

“Go ahead,” Allie said.

“Like my power, the mind link?”

“In some ways, yes, but this was more complicated. The Zyrvie Battle Brain was in complete control, using the warriors more like robots that did whatever it wanted to do. And it could coordinate battles on many different planes at the same time. It was actually pretty remarkable. The academy was able to scan energy waves and we found a tremendous amount of energy coming from a desert on the Zyrvie home world. Getting to the home world was tough, but breaking through the defenses protecting the Battle Brain was even tougher.”

“Several of the academy’s best Fighters came together and created a plan to get to it and destroy it. Some didn’t want to destroy it but instead capture it and study it but it was determined that such action would be dangerous, that the Brain could control its army over long distances and no one was sure if we could control the signals coming from it. In order to put a quick end to the war, it was decided to destroy it.”

Jillian had noticed something Allie had said and she wasn’t sure if she should say something about it. Most of the time, Allie had mentioned ‘the leaders of the academy’ but once she used the word ‘we’, like she had been a part of it. Jillian figured out an easy way to ask. She raised her hand and Allie told her to ask her question.

“How long have you been the library computer?” Jillian asked.

“A long time, longer than you have been around,” Allie said.

“I *know* that. But were you around during the Zyrvie War?”

“Why, y-yes, I was,” Allie answered. Braden noticed Allie’s hesitation. That wasn’t something a computer should do. He figured he would have one more thing to research once Jack got him through the firewall and into the network.

Before he did that, he was eager to see the final battle of the Zyrvie War. Something told him there was something there he needed to watch.