

DREAMSLINGER



BOOK 1

GRACI KIM

Disney • HYPERION
LOS ANGELES NEW YORK

Copyright © 2025 by Graci Kim

All rights reserved. Published by Disney • Hyperion, an imprint of Buena Vista Books, Inc. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher. For information address Disney • Hyperion, 7 Hudson Square, New York, New York 10013.

First Edition, April 2025

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

FAC-004510-25044

Printed in the United States of America

This book is set in Pacella ITC Std/ITC

Designed by Zareen Johnson

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kim, Graci, author.

Title: Dreamslinger / by Graci Kim.

Description: First edition. • Los Angeles : Disney-Hyperion, 2025. •

Audience: Ages 10–14 • Audience: Grades 7–9 • Summary:

“Fourteen-year-old Aria Loveridge lives at the Resthaven Home for Dreamslingers, a safe haven for children born with a genetic mutation that transports them to a powerfully magical realm while they sleep, but this magic can be unpredictable—even deadly.”—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024013933 • ISBN 9781368104777 (hardcover) •

ISBN 9781368105095 (ebook)

Subjects: CYAC: Fantasy. • Magic—Fiction. • Dreams—Fiction. • LCGFT:

Fantasy fiction. • Novels.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.K556 Dr 2025 • DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024013933>

Reinforced binding

Visit www.DisneyBooks.com

To all those who are exceptions to the rule.

May you rise to be exceptional.



GOOD MORNING, RESTHAVEN

TODAY WAS GOING TO BE REVOLUTIONARY, ARIA LOVERIDGE THOUGHT, as she got out of bed and reached for the metal-fiber gloves from her bedside table. Next to them, propped up against the box of dominoes, was a little note from her dad.

Morning, Sparkler! Wager a game of dominoes after the big do?

Aria smiled as she slipped on the gloves. “Sparkler” was her dad’s nickname for her, after the little firework. Ever since she was born, she’d been quick to alight and quick to temper. Her childhood tantrums were legendary—a common early indicator of the gene.

But even before they discovered she was a dreamslinger—that is, a carrier of the dreamslinger genetic mutation—her dad had made sure she knew there was nothing wrong with her. She was merely a deep-feeling kid. A person who felt the world more than

the average. As her parent, his job was to teach her how to manage those big emotions.

He was, hands down, her biggest hero. And today he was finally going to be recognized in front of the entire country.

Giddy with nervous anticipation, Aria made her way down to the lab in the basement of Resthaven Home for Dreamslingers, joining her fellow PJ-clad residents for their morning check-ins.

“Aria Loveridge, please approach,” Dr. Dixon’s stiff voice rang out as he released a resident from one of the four chambers spanning the length of the lab. He strode across the shiny tiled floor to sit back at his desk, opening Aria’s file on his computer and nodding toward the plastic chair. Before Aria had a chance to sit down, the questioning began.

“The brain monitor recorded heightened activity during your sleep last night between 3:12 a.m. and 3:40 a.m. Did you have any dreams?”

Aria fidgeted with her gloved fingers. “I remember one where I lost a few of my teeth. I hate those. And I think I also had one where I couldn’t find the toilet. Pretty *crappy*, if you ask me.”

He pretended not to hear her joke. “Did you have any dreams about the Nightmare Circle?”

“Yes.” This was pretty standard. For a reason no one really understood, all dreamslingers shared the same recurring dream. They would find themselves in a circular wilderness, containing a creek, valley, and eerie woodlands, all blanketed by a violet sky.

“Did you encounter any of the Beasts in the Circle?” Dr. Dixon continued.

“Yes, the Bird Beast.”

The gigantic bird with a tail of flames was one of the four Beasts

that dreamslingers could encounter in their dreams. There was also the Turtle Beast (whose shell was made of ice), the Tiger Beast (whose fur was made of autumn leaves), and the Dragon Beast (whose scales were made of flower petals). All four were as giant and terrifying as they were strange and mesmerizing.

Dr. Dixon typed into his computer. “Did the Beast lure you to its sea?”

Aria lowered her eyes and gave a small nod. She’d followed the bird to the south end of the Nightmare Circle, where the curved boundary abruptly gave way to a chasm of burning fire.

No one knew why there were four “seas”—the South Sea of Fire, the North Sea of Ice, the West Sea of Floating Leaves, and the East Sea of Poisonous Plants—surrounding the edges of the Nightmare Circle, each guarded by one of the Beasts. Nor did they understand why the Beasts tempted the dreamers to jump into them. What Aria did know was that ignoring the inexplicable desire to leap into the seas took every speck of willpower she had.

Dr. Dixon stopped typing into the computer and narrowed his eyes at Aria. “And did you make contact with the South Sea of Fire?”

“Only with my toes,” Aria quickly admitted, knowing that any lies would be uncovered as soon as she went into the chamber. “Then I immediately pulled back, I swear.”

Entering the seas infected dreamslingers with that particular affliction. That meant when the dreamer woke up, their Outbursts that day would take the form of the sea they encountered. Fire, ice, wind, or poison.

Dr. Dixon’s shrewd eyes bored into Aria as he pushed the return button on his keyboard. “You know as well as I do how

much is riding on today. Your dad has worked hard to get us here. Do not let us down.”

Aria huffed. “Really, Dr. D? As if I’m not putting enough pressure on myself!”

She was well aware that as Professor Jack Loveridge’s daughter, she’d be seen as a walking example of his work. Her dad’s pioneering research on dreamslinger welfare was the reason the gene-compromised were finally being treated with the care they’d been denied for far too long. Resthaven was the result of all his work. And if today was a success, the Resthaven model would be replicated throughout the entire country. There’d be no room for mistakes today.

“Now go extract everything acquired during your dream. Every last drop.”

Aria hurried down the hall of extraction rooms, past the heated chamber able to melt ice within seconds, the detoxification chamber able to nullify all manner of poisons, and the vacuum chamber designed to withstand gale-force winds, to get to the fourth chamber. This one was padded with fireproof walls, the floor and ceiling covered with a white fire-extinguishing gel.

Bolting the door behind her, Aria peeled off her protective metal-fiber gloves, and immediately felt the onslaught of feelings she’d been trained to withhold. As with all dreamslingers, emotions were the trigger to Aria’s Outbursts, and inside the safety of the chambers was the only time the residents were encouraged to let them go. She cracked her knuckles, the anticipation of release almost painful under her skin. Then she allowed the storm of nerves, fear, excitement, and tension to reach their peak before expelling it all from her person.

She let out a deep-bellied howl as hungry flames whooshed out of her fingers, and with it came a delicious release. She closed her eyes and let her mind wander. She thought about how lucky she was to be in Resthaven. How nice it'd been to celebrate her fourteenth birthday with her fellow residents. How safe she was inside these walls.

Soon, she was traveling back to the memory of her first Outburst. It was a year ago now, when she was still thirteen, during school camp at Almiro State Park. She'd fallen asleep in her cabin, her belly full of s'mores and campfire stories, when she'd had a terrifying dream of a giant amber-leafed tiger chasing her into a sea of floating autumn leaves.

When she bolted awake from the nightmare, her body had tingled painfully like it had been dunked in hot crackling candy. Scared and confused, she'd shaken out her throbbing fingers, only to release a deadly windstorm into her cabin. The windows exploded and her sleeping cabinmates were violently flung from their bunk beds, hitting the ground like rag dolls. That was how Aria discovered she was a carrier of the dreamslinger gene.

It was safe to say she was traumatized. Learning you suffered from the same genetic mutation as the people who killed your mom was enough to scar a kid for life.

Back in the extraction chamber, Aria drained every last wisp of fire she could conjure from her hands until all that spat out was smoke. And only when her body was numb and her throat hoarse from howling did she allow herself to leave, finally feeling prepared to face what was sure to become the best day of her and her dad's lives.



“Basima, I think we need a bit more polish on these floors. I can’t see my reflection.”

“Maria, let’s make sure the singed curtains are all replaced. Oh, and the yoga mats with the acid burns, too.”

“Do you think they should film the meditation room or the breath-work pods? Actually, maybe the art-therapy wing would be better.”

Aria was aware she was probably coming off bossy and demanding to the Resthaven staff, which was not her intention. But as she scoured every corner of the Home on the way to the Morning Mantra session, she was gripped with the need for everything to be *perfect* for her dad’s big moment.

It wasn’t every day that the US Commissioner of Dreamslinger Relations and the governor of Texas came to visit, let alone sign the national rollout of your dad’s Dreamslinger Home initiative live on national television. This was their one chance to make Resthaven the sparkling example of what could be in every state in America.

Realizing she was late for leading Morning Mantra, Aria hurried to the commons room.

“Restrain, contain, maintain!” Aria chanted from the stage as the residents beat their bowl drums and joined her in repeating the same three words over and over again. “Restrain, contain, maintain!”

Morning Mantra always took place after the check-ins with Dr. Dixon and his team. It only took five minutes, but Dad was right that it helped start each day with gratitude and united purpose.

“Grateful are we for the protection we receive, from the dangers within us we cannot foresee,” Aria recited to conclude the session. “May we be free from doing harm to our kin, and each do our part for goodness to win.”

“Restrain, contain, maintain!” the residents echoed in unison.

Aria was just stepping off the stage when Pablo, a sixteen-year-old fellow resident, turned on the news.

“Guys, look—there’s been another anti-slinger attack in Almiro!”

Everyone crowded around the tiny TV.

“That’s the third in as many weeks,” Levi, another resident pointed out, shuddering. “Isn’t that the town hall? That’s just down the road.”

Aria spoke above the residents’ worried mutterings. “That’s why today is so important. Dad’s work is helping counter anti-slinger rhetoric, but there’s a lot more work to be done.”

The residents nodded in agreement.

“Makes you appreciate how far we’ve come,” Pablo murmured, which incited another series of nods.

He was right. Dreamslingers had always been a marginalized group in society, deemed dangerous, volatile, and to be avoided unless necessary. But ten years ago, when there was a mass dreamslinger Outburst in Texas, thousands of people died and the landscape shifted overnight. Many states passed laws that allowed dreamslingers to be locked up without the need for trial. Mere suspicion was enough to be incarcerated for life. They’d become public enemy number one.

Some particularly fervent anti-slingers went as far as to demand the eradication of all dreamslingers, as if they were pests who

needed to be culled. But through the chaos, Aria's dad had risen as a voice of radical compassion.

Despite the Great Outburst having killed Aria's mom, her dad had introduced a revolutionary approach to dreamslinger welfare. He argued the gene-compromised were not criminals. They were patients who deserved society's care. If dreamslingers could be taught the skills to "restrain, contain, and maintain," it would be a win-win for humanity. Little did he know his daughter would hit puberty and become one of the beneficiaries of his work.

She owed everything to her dad. Pride swelled in her chest as Aria returned to her room to grab one of her late mom's journals and to wrap the band with a four-petaled flower—the universal dreamslinger symbol—around her upper arm. It was another of her dad's recommendations. Wearing the symbol prevented dreamslingers from being accused of hiding their identity for nefarious reasons. It also allowed more cautious citizens to keep their distance, and be safe from any potential Outbursts. In Aria's experience, the armband was an effective tool for her safety, and for others'.

Satisfied that it was affixed properly to her arm, Aria made her way to the main doors of Resthaven and faced the bright morning, already heady with the summer heat. Her dad and the important guests were arriving later this afternoon for their big live-streamed event. And there were still many things to be done.

But first, there was somewhere important Aria needed to go.