

Koji: Dreamweaving For Dummies
Chapter 4

As Darius stood leaning on a large tree branch and scanning the woods around them through squinted eyes, Koji had to use all the willpower he had to try and not laugh. He was still dangerously close to failing, as Darius stood about four feet tall, looked about nine and sounded about seventy. He had been lecturing Koji about something or other for the last half hour, but Koji was too busy concentrating on keeping a straight face and had missed most of it.

“Are you even listening to me?” Darius’ words snapped Koji back to attention. He nodded fervently. “Uh-huh, you were talking about your childhood...”

Darius banged the end of his staff against a rock in the ground. “Not *my* childhood, you dope. *Your* childhood. You need to remember what it felt like to be a child to be able to dreamweave yourself into one.” He took a deep breath. “It’s terribly difficult, of course,” he added. “We may remember the games we played and the things we used to do, but we forget the most important details. We forget how it truly feels to be so small, how huge everything and everyone looked, how we perceived our parents as unquestionable authority, how our only worries in the world were tomorrow’s homework and which flavors the bag of penny candy contained. We forget how we never had to think of what the future hours or days or years would bring, since there was always somebody else that was thinking of those for us.” He stared up his nose at Koji with an air of arrogant wisdom and authority. “There’s nothing simple about childhood, Koji,” he stated. “It’s a complicated science. We are all born with the knowledge of it, but then we forget it over time, and even for someone with my experience and skill, it takes months, even years of dedicated work to master it again.”

Koji nodded again, even though he had no idea what Darius was talking about.

“Now,” said Darius, “give it a try. I don’t expect you to get even close to succeeding at this point, but you have to start somewhere, right?”

“Okay,” said Koji, rubbing his hands together. “Any tips?”

“Finding a specific memory works best for me,” said the boy. “A moment from your childhood. A time and place, where you can clearly remember being there, as yourself. If you can recall such a moment with all your senses, that should be a good place to start.”

Koji closed his eyes and started sifting through his memories, until he came to one that froze in his mind’s eye like a scene from a movie. It lingered there for a while, then came to life. First the scent of wood smoke and burnt sugar filled his nose, then he heard the voices. His grandmother’s, soft and high-pitched like a songbird, and his numerous cousins in a rowdy chorus. It was his twelfth birthday. He was at his grandparents’ house, grandma had made caramel candy and Koji’s cousins were fighting over who was going to eat the little marzipan spaceship on the center of the cake. “Koji eat sky ship,” chirped grandma. “He is birthday boy.” Koji remembered how picked up the spaceship and “flew” it into his mouth. How the soft marzipan stuck to his teeth, and the overly-sweet almond taste overpowered him. “Gotta watch for those black holes, Captain,” he said to himself. “See you in a different life!” He heard his own voice, the thin and crackly voice of a twelve-year-old boy.

Then he realized that he had spoken those words out loud. Koji opened his eyes.

He was still standing in the middle of the woods. Darius was leaning against a tree branch. Koji didn’t even notice that the arrogant expression on the boy’s face had been replaced by surprise. He just stared at Darius. Straight on. Eye to eye.

That was what had brought on Koji’s shock- finding himself at eye level with Darius. He stared at his hands- the hands of a child. Then he noticed that he was wearing a Star Wars shirt,

and thick canvas pants, the same clothes he was wearing on his twelfth birthday. He still had marzipan stuck to his back teeth. He grinned from ear to ear.

"Impressive," said Darius with a voice as expressive as a brick wall. His eyes were filled with a mixture of annoyance and approval. Koji had a feeling that was the closest thing he was going to get to a compliment from the boy.

"Wow!" Koji exclaimed. He dashed from tree to tree, jumping over trunks and laughing. "This is fun! Look at me! I'm a kid again! I don't have to grow up any more!"

Darius rolled his eyes. "I don't think you ever have in the first place," he muttered.

"Let's go show the others! I can't wait to hear what they'll say!" Without waiting for a response from Darius, Koji ran out of the woods towards the park where he knew Mark was meeting with the other Dreamweavers.

When he saw them in the distance, Koji suddenly had an idea. The Dreamweavers, in their child disguises, were all at the playground by the river, sitting on top of the monkey bars like birds on a branch. Mark and Elyssa were in a heated discussion, while Patrick tried to hang down from his knees while holding onto his toy pistol with one hand. Koji grinned, and ran faster.

The children didn't even pay attention to Koji running towards them. It was a sunny day, and dozens of other children were playing around the park and the playground. It was, Koji realized, a perfect disguise.

Just as he was running by the monkey bars, he reached out and grabbed Patrick's pistol. "Hey! That's mine!" he heard Patrick yell behind him, but he didn't slow down. Instead, he headed towards the massive war memorial statue beside a flower bed, further away from the playground and the crowd of children and families. Patrick's continued screams behind him assured Koji that he was still being followed. *Excellent*, he thought smugly.

He ducked behind the statue, and noted with delight that he wasn't even out of breath. Then he closed his eyes.

It took Patrick a few seconds to catch up with him. "Give me my..." the boy started to shout, but then stopped abruptly and stared at Koji.

"Looking for this?" Koji handed Patrick his pistol, looking down at the boy from a foot and a half above, his voice once again deep and sturdy.

"You bloody idiot," Patrick sighed, though not without a smile on his face. "You almost gave me a heart attack!" Then he paused. "Was that really you?"

In reply, Koji just closed his eyes and took his mind back in time one more time. Once again, he was a child in a big world, his eyes level with Patrick's.

"Well, *I'm* impressed!" he heard Mark's voice behind him. The blond boy was standing with his arms crossed, a wide grin on his face. "And Darius thought you were hopeless... Look at you! Just a few weeks of dreamweaving practice, and you're already doing what took some of us half a lifetime!" He took a sideways glance at Elyssa.

Elyssa, standing beside him, snorted. "Beginner's luck," she said disdainfully, though Koji could tell that she, too, was pleased.

Mark nodded. "I guess it helps to be young at heart in the first place. It must take you a lot less effort to feel like a kid."

Koji shrugged. "Maybe," he said. "You know, you never told me what this disguise is all about. You're all heroes. Why do you have to act like kids? I mean, if you have to blend into this world, can't you be something cooler? Like, I don't know, doctors and lawyers and astronauts and such?"

Patrick gritted his teeth. "I have to be my own father sometimes, but I guess that doesn't count."

Elyssa ignored him, and started to explain. "Remember what Mark told you before? About us being the last handful of Dreamweavers?"

Koji nodded.

"Well," the freckled girl went on. "When you possess powers like ours, there's bound to be somebody that doesn't like that, right?"

Koji nodded again, wondering what Elyssa was trying to get at.

"We're being hunted down," the girl said bluntly. "Like rabbits. There's a demon named Dolgrath, who has made it his immortal life's goal to make sure that each and every one of us becomes a part of history so obscure that even the lamest textbooks won't quote us in a footnote."

"And where do children come into all of this?" Koji scratched his head, trying to make sense of Elyssa's words.

"Illia," said Mark. "Even though he doesn't know it, we think he holds a power that's above and beyond ours. Something so great that it makes the rest of us look like cheap stage magicians." He paced back and forth, his eyes fixed on the grass. "We have all worked to become Dreamweavers," he said. "We trained, we practiced, we faced dangers and trials before our power reached its strength. Illia, the Chosen One, was simply born with it. He needs no training, only awakening. "

Confusion welled inside Koji's mind. He had a million questions, and didn't even know where to start asking. "What... how... why is it Illia? Why is *he* the Chosen One of all the people in the world? What makes him special?"

Elyssa opened her mouth to explain, but then quickly put a finger to her lips. Koji looked over his shoulder to see Illia approaching, with Darius and Nadia walking beside him.

"Save that for another time," Mark whispered. "I'll introduce you to Illia."

