

The Dreamer: Origins

Jonathan Rivera

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Compelling magical creatures add intrigue to this ambitious fantasy adventure.

The Dreamer is a complex fantasy adventure that takes place in a vivid world full of unique creatures. Jonathan Rivera's lush landscape lays the groundwork for more adventures.

John is a young boy held captive by a cruel ice queen and forced to work as a slave with other child prisoners. None of the children have any memories of who they were before they came to the queen's frozen palace. The children plot to escape, and they receive assistance from an unexpected source—a rat named Midwa—who tells John he must lead the children to the fire kingdom in order to defeat the ice queen.

The Dreamer is an ambitious story full of magic, mystical creatures, and evil rulers. In their quest to defeat the ice queen and fire king, John and his companions meet phoenix dragons, sand demons, Sultarian leopards, and ghost soldiers. Though the book offers new and creative ideas, some of the story is highly reminiscent of other well-known fantasies: the ice queen who turns her subjects into ice sculptures and the fellowship that is formed to defeat the fire king—whose power comes from the ring he wears—will be familiar to many.

The plot is very complex, and there is no explanation given for how the kingdom came to be in a state of evil oppression until well past the halfway point of the narrative. The characters do not seem to have any motivation for their actions, and because so many of them do not have any memories, their interactions seem abrupt and random. This is frustrating and confusing for the reader. While it is understandable why the children are running away—memories or not, they are being abused—it is not evident what motivates the guards to be cruel. Without any memories or any positive relationships, it is difficult to understand why some characters bond and others do not or why some fight for freedom while others are happy to stay oppressed.

Additionally, the florid descriptions often render the story difficult to follow. For example, a sunrise is described as follows: "The void slowly revealed a hazy light at its epicenter, a glimmer that struggled to coexist. With its courageous efforts to expand, it began to steadily overcome the darkness. Before long, the black had subsided, and the veil that had covered his eyes was lifted." Though such descriptions can add interest to a story when used sparingly, *The Dreamer* overflows with these moments, which can be distracting.

Another example: "Meanwhile, Arachno continued its raging shrieks and spewed forth acid wildly from above. As they constantly submerged and emerged from beneath the waters to avoid direct impact from the acid, the kids one again fought for their lives." In the aforementioned example, "raging shrieks" and "spewing acid" are more than graphic enough without it being "wild" as well. If the kids are constantly going under water to avoid the acid, their peril is obvious and the reader does not need to be told that they are fighting for their lives.

There is a great deal of potential here, however. The author has created an intriguing world and filled it with unusual creatures. The sand demons (giant monsters that can take any form) and ghost soldiers (shades of the dead bound

by the evil fire king) are particularly compelling. By the end of the story, the author has developed John's character to the point of being interesting, and he has laid the groundwork for more adventures.

CATHERINE THURESON (January 23, 2014)

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