

# SECRETS OF THE SKY

BOOK TWO

## THE POISON WAVES

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# 1



## Mermaids Smell like Fish Scales

**I**F THERE WAS one thing that Kiya didn't like, it was mermaids.

"I hate mermaids!" she said for the zillionth time to her twin brother, Kinjal. "I can't believe Lola would choose such a babyish theme for her birthday party!"

"What d'ya want her to choose as her theme? The periodic table?" Kinjal gave a laughing snort at the cleverness of his own joke, making Kiya roll her eyes. Unlike her brother, she was a big fan of all science-y and scientific things.

Kinjal was, as usual, roughhousing with their dog, Thums-Up, who was chocolate colored and named after their mom's favorite childhood soda. Kinjal was hurling the dog's tennis ball around the living room in a way their

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parents would never let him do if they were home. But it was parent-teacher conference night, and for the first time in the twins' ten long years of life, Ma and Baba had agreed to leave them alone at home for the few hours they would be gone. Probably an unwise decision on their part. It wasn't that Kiya wanted, or needed, a babysitter. She was just sure that her brother was seconds away from breaking something. Also as usual.



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“At least a periodic table of elements birthday party would be unique!” Kiya fixed one of her braids with a firm yank.

“Don’t be boring. Now, a *warrior sloths*-themed party, *that* would be way awesome!” Kinjal enthused, naming the long-armed, slow-moving heroes of his favorite fantasy series.

Kiya’s eyes narrowed behind her red-framed glasses. “Just because I’m not a walking chaos monster like you doesn’t mean I’m boring!”

Chaos monsters were the mortal enemies of the warrior sloths, and also what she liked to call her brother. Because if anything, Kinjal was chaotic. And sometimes, in her opinion, also monstrous.

“Just because you’re a perfect, never-make-a-mistake control freak doesn’t mean I’m a chaos monster!” Kinjal said in between throws of the dog’s tennis ball, which bounced off the walls, furniture, and floor.

“Who are you calling a control freak, you . . . you”—  
Kiya tried to think of a suitable insult—“*freak* freak?”

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“Was that the best you could come up with?” Kinjal snorted. “Anyway, way to rub it in, Dr. Perfecto-Pants. I’m not even invited to Lola’s mermaid birthday bash.”

“I could ask if you could come.” Kiya smartly caught the tennis ball before her brother could knock the giant, messy bag of Cheetos he was snacking on from the end table. Not to mention the lamp that also sat there. “To the party, I mean.”

“No way.” Kinjal jammed some more Cheetos into his already-orange-lipped mouth. Even his shaggy hair had some Cheeto dust in it, making him look like he’d gotten some kind of weird punk rock dye job. “Don’t ask Lola to include me. I don’t need a pity invite.”

Thums-Up gave a low whine, as if she was agreeing, and Kinjal tossed her a Cheeto, which she caught midair with a loud, messy crunch.

Mermaid-birthday-party Lola was their next-door neighbor, who Kiya had made friends with a few weeks ago only to make her brother, Kinjal, jealous. And now, because of that one bad decision, Kiya was the proud owner of a sparkly, peacock-colored birthday party invitation with a

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red-haired, sparkly-tiara-wearing mermaid on the front. I mean, if there was anything Kiya hated more than mermaids, it was tiaras. Oh, and sparkles. Gah.

Kiya stared at the card like she was trying to set it on fire with a death glare. “It would be better if you were there,” she said in a small voice.

Despite all the bad things about being her brother’s twin, one of the good things was always having him right next to her when she felt nervous. Which, as much as she didn’t like to admit it, was a lot of the time. Especially around new people.

Thums-Up was still whining and Kinjal put out his hand for the ball, which Kiya rolled back to her brother along the floor in the least furniture-damaging way possible.

“So what d’ya have against mermaids anyway?” Kinjal asked as he sent the tennis ball, and the dog, flying around the room again. Kiya wrinkled her nose as she noticed he was only wearing one sock. And it was dirty.

“Mermaids are gross,” Kiya grumbled, not even sure if she believed it. “Women with sparkly tails who live

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under the sea? Come on, it's all magic and make-believe. So much less interesting than scientific facts. Plus, those mermaids probably smell like fish scales."

"Good one!" Her brother gave a loud snort. Which made Thums-Up zoom around in yipping excitement. "But seriously, what's your problem with magic? Do you have amnesia? Did you forget all the magic that happened to us only a couple weeks ago?"

Kiya didn't, of course, have amnesia. And she hadn't, of course, forgotten. Because, as her sometimes exasperated fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Scott, could attest to, Kiya forgot very little. But what had happened to Kiya and Kinjal recently wasn't something she could share at school. Or tell Lola about. Or, really, tell anyone about.

Because only a few weeks ago, Kiya and her brother had ridden off on the backs of some flying pakkhiraj horses named Raat and Snowy across the multiverse to a place called the Kingdom Beyond Seven Oceans and Thirteen Rivers. The place their own parents were from. The place their own father was the rightful king of. They'd even discovered that their mother was a magical rakkhoshi and



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that they themselves had inherited some of her magical powers.

It was the sort of story that would make Mrs. Scott even more twitchy than she normally was, and definitely get Kiya sent to the principal's office. Which was not something that had ever happened to Kiya, of course, but she wasn't willing to start letting it happen now.

Kiya sighed, looking around their ordinary, normal living room in their ordinary, normal house in their ordinary, normal town. She felt bored. She felt itchy. She felt like she wanted to go on another adventure. Not that she wanted to admit any of that to her brother.

"Now that we're back in New Jersey, everything that happened seems like a dream." Kiya tried to keep the longing out of her voice but wasn't sure she succeeded.

"Well, it wasn't! Everything that happened was real!" Kinjal said through a mouthful of orange snacks. "We helped save the bees and the entire ecosystem of the Pakkhiraj Sky Kingdom *and* the Kingdom Beyond. We fought the Serpent King Sesha and escaped his clutches! We discovered that we're a prince and princess, not to

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mention that you can make earthquakes and I can make water move!”

“All of that was pretty cool.” Kiya glanced down at her ordinary-looking hands—hands that had done such extraordinary things.

“Pretty cool is right!” laughed Kinjal as he wrestled their wriggly dog, who was desperately trying to lick Cheeto crumbs off his face. He threw the ball high for an over-excited Thums-Up, who barked and leaped up for it, almost taking flight in her enthusiasm.

Of course, the other thing the twins had discovered was that Thums-Up wasn’t really a dog at all, as she appeared to be, but actually a small pakkhiraj horse. Only, with the help of a magic spell, she could hide her rainbow-colored wings and appear like a normal Labrador retriever when she needed to. Which was all the time, naturally, while they were home in Parsippany, New Jersey.

“I just wish that Raat and Snowy would show up and ask us to help them with some mission,” sighed Kiya.

“Hungry for another adventure?” Kinjal guessed.

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Kiya shook her head, annoyed at how quickly her brother had spotted the truth. “No,” she lied. “Just so I don’t have to go to this silly birthday party tomorrow!”

Little did Kiya know then that her wish was about to come true.

