

A Frightful Dream
by Mark J MacNamara

I remember less than a handful of dreams, and this is one of them, one of the rare few. I was reminded of it recently when I had one equally vivid and almost as frightening in its gentleness. That is to say, the subtlety, beauty and colour with which it delivered its horror made it all the more frightening.

I had this dream almost a decade ago. In time it may turn out to be a watershed moment, an epiphany. It has stuck with me so that it seems as natural to write about it now as it would have been at the time. Though some of the finer details are now sketchy, all of the important ones remain.

The way I remember it the dream opens no more extraordinarily than others. Though a slightly unusual situation it would be in reality, in the world of dreams the unusual is not so out of place. I am skiing in the Australian Alps, nowhere specific but reminiscent of Merritt's Chairlift at Thredbo where I worked decades ago. Oddly I am skiing not on a 'run' but down the path cut through the bush for the chairlift itself, around the towers of the chairlift and under the cables and chairs overhead. It's a treacherous place to ski and against the rules. I suppose in hindsight this fact itself may hold some significance. I say 'reminiscent' of Merritt's Chairlift because though the landscape and engineering were generally identical a number of details were starkly different. I was skiing toward a snowy wilderness whereas if it were Merritt's Chairlift I should have been skiing toward Thredbo Village itself.

Toward the bottom of this 'run' the snow began to clear so that I skied into cleared grassland where the slope flattened out. I turned right along a grassy path. At what point I was no longer skiing but walking I'm uncertain.

The first sign that things were awry was a fish that was floating mid-air as though suspended on a child's mobile. While everything up till this point had been realistic or natural, this fish gave the appearance of an object assembled from smooth symmetrical shapes - its body a smooth dark metallic grey sphere with a number of sharply angular protrusions giving the shape of a fish - a figurative, conceptual but highly sophisticated computer animated type of fish. I say 'type' because it was not a computer animation, it was simply visually of that appearance. Its movement as I said was as though it was suspended on child's mobile, gently turning in the delicate wind, and in this its movements were at the same time not entirely unnatural but also distinctly inorganic.

As the fish, the size of a big grapefruit, swung closer to me I suddenly perceived that its surface was perfectly smooth. Its appearance was also quite frightening, for it had a large sharp aggressive horn on its head, big cold eyes and perhaps bared sharp teeth - I'm not sure if my imagination has added this last detail in the intervening years. At any rate this gruesome fish gave me a fright.

I don't remember exactly what happened immediately thereafter. There may have been some movement, an attempt to flee the scary fish. I found myself soon after in a peculiar café - not a European style café with timber walls, chairs and tables, but an American style diner with a laminate bench-top of no particular colour at chest height along the walls around the perimeter. At un-social intervals opposite the bench were fixed immovable stools consisting of a single chrome post with a circular, tight cylindrically

stuffed red vinyl seat at the top – in the style of an American 50s themed ‘burger joint’. The bench and the seats are all that existed of this place, there were no other details of it in my dream. Upon these stools sat a thin spattering of solemn looking barely animate human forms, all male. Not animated figures like our ‘host’, who I would soon meet, but real like me, and immediately unremarkable. Around the same time I perceived these figures I was accosted by a man. He was perhaps in his late 50s or early 60s, grey, and he had a splotchy face like he’d been a drinker, though a number of half healed scars suggested he’d simply suffered prolonged beatings. The man came right up to me and looked me in the eye with intense anger. It gave me a start. He looked like he wanted to say something but his rage was so intense he couldn’t speak, which frightened me because I assumed his shuffling rage was directed at me. At the time I felt I was being physically intimidated.

The confrontation with this man was broken by the appearance of my ‘host’, who in the context of this dreamscape could have been the perfect physical representation of a human being. I say ‘representation’ because again this character was like an animation – smooth and perfect though not a shiny metallic like the fish, not a computer animation but like a more traditional cartoon figure in appearance. He was colourful, in shades that were not exactly pastel and not exactly bright or rich, but vivid nonetheless, vivid enough to be un-real, hues that were not exactly human, something ‘above’ or more perfect than that. He was tall and lean, not muscular and not thin. He had the confidence and bearing of a middle aged man and that was his general appearance. He wore a mid-yellow sweater, in the general design of a light woollen knitted sweater, though of course it was not made of fabric at all but a smooth coloured shape. His hair was mid-brown. I don’t

recall the detail of his face, always kindly and smiling, only that it was an unwrinkled Caucasian one of general middle-aged shape. As I said, he was not muscular and his frame was not overly large but it was a strong frame, inhumanly strong it turned out. He was not actually human, but made in the image of a human.

My host's smiling presence dispatched the scary older man. It was a warm smile – that is to say in the manner of a warm smile, because whatever the intent it curiously had the opposite effect on you. Tall and wholesome he looked down at me with the appearance of such glowing benevolence, as though he genuinely believed that's what he was providing.

I told him I had to be off and perhaps motioned to leave. He put a kindly hand on my shoulder and, pleasantly smiling, told me to sit down, take a load of my feet. Though his hand and his smile were pleasant and kindly in delivery, they came with a cold hard understanding. The kind hand and the warm smile were entirely immovable. In that instant so much became clear, so much was communicated in that grasp.

He understood he was being pleasant and kindly but this was not a request. His hand, his arm, his whole being was utterly immovable. He had an inhuman, unearthly strength - he was as though animated after all, unhindered by the constraints of reality. In that instant I understood his madness, the madness of this thing - a force for evil deluded that he was a force for good. I knew I could not leave, I was to be seated at one of these stools for eternity. The figures around me, the unanimated ones were as I was. I now knew the scary older man with the battered face, so filled with futile rage he couldn't speak, was me - my future. We were all of us trapped, though the entity that had us trapped did not see it that way, he truly believed he was doing good, doing us a favour, doing what was

right for us. Why you may ask? What was his motivation? There didn't need to be a reason, the fact he did it was reason in itself. Remembering that he was not after all 'real', motive was not a prerequisite. It just was as it was. In that instant I knew I was constrained for the rest of my life like I had never been before. In that instant it was clear there was absolutely no chance of escape. There was no fighting him, my 'benefactor' – he was simply invulnerable. There was no reasoning with him, he was merely what he was, as he had been created, free from reason, from any possibility of it, like a toaster is free from being driven to the shop like a car – it simply doesn't do it, it was not conceived with this capacity. There was no sneaking away when he was not looking, my new compatriots were testament to that fact. He was all seeing, or at least he didn't need to be, he was as an animation after all – he was simply there when he needed to be. There was no room to move and my situation was completely, utterly, and unconditionally helpless, I had walked into a trap that could not be breached. In the same instant I understood that Chizuru and Bryce were in that world with me, not with me in that café, but elsewhere in his domain, under his control, and in this knowledge my despair hit an unprecedented depth. I also knew my access to them would be limited if at all and completely at his whim.

In that same instant I woke and as I did I knew no matter what it took, no matter how utterly hopeless and helpless my situation, we would be free of him. To this day I don't know how, I've not yet worked it out, but we will be freed.