



Journey to the World of Dreams

By Gary L.M. Martin

Prologue: The King of Dreams

The King of Dreams stood before the Mirror of Mirrors in the heart of the Octagon. At his side was the Prince of Midnight. They stared into the Mirror and saw the young man asleep in bed.

"He looks so... harmless. So insignificant," said the Prince of Midnight. The Prince of Midnight, on the other hand, looked anything but harmless. He was tall, had a square jaw, and had one eye bigger than the other. He wore a cloak of darkness and equally dark armor which literally oozed blackness.

"But he could be the answer to everything," said Colarami, the Thardicar, the King of Dreams.

"Or he could be the end of us all," opined the Prince of Midnight. "He could destroy the entire Dreamdom. He could destroy the entire world, if this isn't handled properly!"

"Then we'll have to make sure it's done properly," said the King of Dreams, giving him a pointed look.

Chapter 1: A World Gone Mad

The world was going mad.

It started gradually, over a period of years. First it began with sleeplessness. Millions of people simply had trouble falling asleep, or failing that, sleeping productively. They would wake up fatigued, with vague memories of wild dreams, but still felt incredibly tired.

And then the madness came. Anxiety spiked. So did delusions, paranoia, obsessive-compulsive behavior, and a whole raft of mental disorders. Psychiatrists found themselves booked for months in advance. Production lines worked overtime to produce the latest and most advanced model of Robopsychiatrists, the AMA acclaimed *Doctor Grossberg* series, to try and meet pent up demand. Millions of doses of psychotropic drugs and vaginal aroma therapy candles were prescribed, but these treated *symptoms*, not causes.

People were still going crazy. It became commonplace to see a person, apparently walking normally on the street, to suddenly drop his briefcase and cry out at the top of his lungs. It became normal to be in an elevator with a man who got a crazy look in his eyes and screamed at the top of his lungs, "Let me out! Let me oooout!". It became ordinary to see men dressed in white spilling out of white vans marked "Mental Health" running around with enormous butterfly-like nets to grab people who had lost control.

But it only *really* hit home for Alowishus Garrity when Jamal Mubarak threw himself out of the office window two rows down from Garrity's desk. Garrity, who asked people to call him Gair, (he absolutely *hated* the name Alowishus), was at work one day when Jamal, who was Director of Diversity, suddenly grabbed his head and cried out, "I can't take it! I can't take it anymore!" And then, before anyone could react, he yelled, "For the greater glory of Laquinta!" and crashed through the window by his desk. As Jamal plunged down ten flights, they all heard "Laaaaquiiiiiiiiinnnttttaaaaaa-" and then a barely audible *thump*.

Jamal had been a refugee from Ramada, where people worshiped Laquinta, the God of Blood. Even before the current wave of global madness, it was expected that a certain percentage of refugees from Ramada would go crazy. Sometimes they would massacre a bunch of people in a store. Sometimes they would butcher a few dozen people in a place of worship. Sometimes they would blow themselves up in a crowded holothater. People from Laquinta did that, and it was just accepted, because even though people from Ramada believed in harsh traditions such as female genital mutilation, sexual slavery, and executing men who made love to other men's

bottoms, accepting hundreds of thousands of them as refugees was deemed the virtuous and proper thing to do.

But Jamal wasn't at all violent. Jamal had fled Ramada because he was attracted to other mens' bottoms. He claimed that when the Book of Blood "condemned men lying with men" that was a transcription error; Jamal said the Great Book meant to have *condoned*, not *condemned* Assosexuality. But others of his culture didn't see it that way. That was why he fled Ramada.

Everyone liked Jamal. He had a greasy beard, but a winning smile, virtuous dark skin, four good front teeth, and all the girls at work befriended him because he was a "safe man", one they could talk to about shopping and cosmetics and feelings about being taken by their boyfriends in different ways.

And so for Jamal to kill himself while invoking Laquinta seemed totally contrary to everything they knew about him. Jamal was not religious; in fact, if he ever stuck his head inside a Laquintan Mosque, even in suburban Arlington, Virginia, it was highly unlikely he ever would have pulled it out again.

It was the madness. The madness, which they had heard about on the news in every detail, had finally reached out and touched someone who Gair knew.

And that's when the dreams began.

Alowishus Garrity's life had always been a blur.

Gair--he called himself Gair, for he hated to be called Alowishus, but he *did* like to be called Gair--grew up in an orphanage. He never knew his parents. Gair knew *intellectually* he had spent years in an orphanage, but the details of it, of his past, were blurred in his mind, and this sometimes troubled him.

Gair developed an aptitude for math and science. And so he got accepted to the University of Pennsylvania on a scholarship for disadvantaged white people, and there he studied mathematics. Gair seemed to have an aptitude for statistics, and so focused on that. It wasn't that he had any particular interest in statistics; but neither did he *dislike* it. Gair had few dislikes but even fewer likes. He kept to himself and focused on the day to day grind of getting through school. People who knew him, and they were few in number, said that he was a shy, quiet, boy who didn't say very much.

And then, when he graduated, he took a job with *Demand Environmental Justice Now!*, a group dedicated to fighting man-made temperature change. *Demand Environmental Justice Now!* believed that masculinity and capitalism was causing temperature to fluctuate wildly on the Earth. Men gave in to their masculine urges by eating beef, and raising beef increased the temperature of the planet. And then there was capitalism. Manufacturing. Retail. Exchange of goods and services. The planet groaned under the heavy load. As a result, daily temperatures fluctuated, often wildly within the same day. The weather could be fifty degrees in the morning and eighty degrees by the afternoon, then back to fifty again after nightfall! It simply wasn't natural. 99.99% of all climate scientists agreed that for thousands of years, the Earth was at a constant temperature of 72 degrees all year around, and this only changed around the beginning of industrialization. Some "crazies" still maintained that the temperature has varied naturally for thousands of years, pointing to the myth of the so-called "ice ages" and the resulting warming thereafter (also a myth!), but since it was a scientific fact that 99.99% of environmental scientists were in agreement about the true causes of temperature change, these deranged individuals were dismissed as confused, mentally ill, and/or tools of the capitalist patriarchy.

With the help of an *extremely* sympathetic media, *Demand Environmental Justice Now!* was very influential, and had a shrewd marketing campaign, featuring a holoposter of a crying child surrounded by dead polar bears with the very self-righteous caption "If not now, when?"

Gair didn't have any special interest in working for *Demand Environmental Justice Now!*, or even in fighting temperature change. He seemed qualified for the job of junior statistician, and so Gair took the easy way, as he always did, and applied for and got the job. For Gair, life was like being a leaf floating downstream in a creek; he went wherever life took him, to the path of least resistance.

But as he got older, Gair started to change. He became more self-aware of his situation. He started to question things more, especially the nature of his own existence. Who were his parents? What had happened to them? He never knew. He felt a growing sense that there was more to life than being a statistician at *Demand Environmental Justice Now!*, that he was meant to do something more, to be something greater than he was.

And then the dreams started.