

THE DREAM MAKER

By

IGOR BEDÊ

THE DREAM MAKER by Igor Bedê

www.igorbede.com

Copyright © 2019 Igor Bedê

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher. For more information, send an e-mail to:

contact@igorbede.com

Cover Art by Ángel Sirvent – angel_s80@hotmail.com

Important words must be written.

Fernando and Ravena, you have always believed in me;

Ursula, Isidro, Mari, and Lidia. I arrived with little to offer, you gave me everything;

Marcelo and Eduardo, you encouraged me, and you were brothers before cousins;

My “Guión” friends who supported my endeavor and have always asked, “When is it going to be released?” Lalo, Carol, Bea, Julia, Jaime, Igor, and Nacho; here it is! Juan Carlos, for a constructive view and great technical advice; Sarah, for editing with excellence; Pedro for accepting me in the “Factoría del Guión”, and Javier for making me read the plot in a class; Ángel Sirvent for his patience and art;

Thank you.

*for Fernando & Ravana,
for Ursula,
and for Mari.*

*“... and then you blur the line;
you think you know it,
you think you can control it.
You should ask yourself:
‘will I ever come back?’”*

CHAPTER ONE: INSOMNIA

CHAPTER ONE: INSOMNIA

“So tell me, Lucius. How long have you been awake?” the doctor asked.

“I haven’t slept in three days,” he replied.

His bloodied eyes proved the truth of that sentence, as the light of a small penlight tightened his pupils. Lucius, a young man, not skinny, not fat, with short wavy hair, and a face marked by exhaustion, lay in a bed in the laboratory room. The doctor motioned for him to sit up, which he did with difficulty. He scratched his eyes and put his shattered glasses on. While waiting for the doctor to finish taking notes on a tablet, he scanned the room: a dark-walled environment without much embellishment aside from the typical gadgets applied to the headboard of the bed, a cabinet, a monitor, some abstract sketches that seemed to have been drawn during a seizure, and a couple of landscape paintings.

The doctor was a young and presentable man with black hair and piercing eyes, which were now staring at Lucius; for the latter, that dramatic act implied something serious was going on.

Lucius had been feeling as if he was on the edge of a breakdown. Reality had no borders anymore.

“I would like to do a couple more tests if that’s okay with you,” the doctor said.

“Right,” he answered, concerned about where that would lead.

Between the repetitive sounds of the resonance machine, the doctor tried some chatting.

“Describe to me what happened over the last few days.”

Lucius frowned, closed his eyes, and then started relating the events.

It was an important product presentation, for a highly qualified client. The company could not afford to lose another account at this point, so the burden lay on the creative department, and the office was a stressful place those days. All of the wasted scribbles, unfinished drawings, and exhaustive research, transformed Lucius’s skull into a blender’s pitcher, and his brain was the mix. Sometimes he would immerse himself so deeply in a task that people’s voices sounded low and lost as if they were on the other side of a dome, even when aimed directly at him.

Lucius’s job was to create something that would catch the customer’s attention, by driving them out of their miserable lives and igniting the fire that would urge them to make the desired purchase. Of course, the pressure was absurd. Not that the designers were thought as highly qualified—the bosses considered him and his colleagues to be basically just a bunch of cartoonists, but with more of a juridical impact to it, justifying exploitation of copyrights. At least, the task allowed for some creativity—limited to the board of directors’ evaluation, of course.

The meeting and presentation room was full. There were lots of suits and ties, make-up and hairdos, and serious faces ready to reject ideas and hide genuine emotions. The associates were there to make sure Lucius could finish the assignment. Once announced, he stood up and placed himself in front of the amazing holographic touchscreen, which the employees used to show the technology they had at the office. The investors frowned upon seeing that pale face-melting man, who could barely stand or keep his eyes open. Lucius looked at them and witnessed a collection of grimaces. Then, he started to hear voices, except no one in the room seemed to have opened their mouths.

The sensation of standing in front of important executives—whose opinions your job depended on—being weary, underfed, and having to be convincing of your craft, was overwhelming for Lucius.

He fainted.

It was twilight. He woke up, once again. At the age of eleven, he enjoyed the view of nature passing by through the car’s window. It was also a way to avoid getting sick.

The vehicle’s uniform speed provided a sensation of floating. Up front, his father took care of the driving, while his mother slept with her face turned to the side, which allowed Lucius to contemplate.

He then broke his father’s trance. “Daddy, is it going to take long?”

His father put on a shy smile. “We’ll be there by morning, champ.”

Lucius glanced once again at the view outside. The remaining light that followed the setting of the sun was almost gone, unveiling pearls in the sky. Gradually, a handful of stars

appeared as if they were being lit one at a time, while darkness swallowed the last rays of sunlight.

He turned back to his mother and she was sound asleep. His father tried to focus his attention on driving, covering his yawn with his hand, which he placed back on the wheel. Lucius kept looking at his dad, whose eyelids closed in a slow movement and then rapidly reopened. The contagious effect made him repeat his father's ritual and then he started to feel weightless, distant. The voices were back. They seemed to be calling for him.

"Lucius, can you hear me? Are you all right?"

He was just beginning to discern reality from that elaborated memory. Opening his eyes was a difficult task. Those who surrounded him were only a bunch of silhouettes.

"He's coming back!" someone yelled.

With their help, Lucius rose to a sitting position. Now his vision was clear and he recognized a couple of co-workers, as well as others he had never seen in his life.

"What happened?" he asked.

"You passed out," one of them said. "We were about to call an ambulance, but Michael said it wasn't necessary."

"By the way, he wants to see you in his office, now," another co-worker added.

The elevator door opened and he came out onto a large room that preceded the associates' offices. It was dark and all of the desks were empty. The room on the end, in which the confrontation was going to take place, had a glass wall that allowed Lucius to see the three major associates waiting for him.

As he walked, he tried adjusting his shirt and hair, even though nothing could mask his suffering and trashed face. Pure fear started spreading through his chest and his body started to weigh him down to the point that he was not able to move. Yet, he managed to open the glass door.

The set for the confrontation consisted of a large rectangular table surrounded with chairs, of which only three were occupied. On the walls on each side of the room, hung a couple of landscape paintings. There was a cabinet near the entrance. Behind the associates, the large glass window reflected Lucius's beaten-up image.

It did not help his confidence.

"Have a seat," John said.

John, who was on the right side, had an alternative look to what was considered corporate, with blonde hair long enough to reach his shoulders but combed into a bun, and a two-day beard. On the left was Brad, a bulky fellow with curly hair and an expression that told how much he considered all of this to be a waste of time—nothing was going to stop him from finishing a mayonnaise-stuffed beef sandwich that dripped all over the table. In the middle, and supposedly the most important position, was Michael. He was dressed in a trendy suit wrapped up and adorned with arrogance and pride.

Lucius sat down.

“What the fuck happened?” John asked getting up and walking to stand by Lucius’s side.

“He panicked,” Brad said, expelling pieces of food into the air.

“I didn’t panic. I’m just... exhausted,” Lucius said naively, expecting some compassion.

“Do you have any idea of the damage your spectacle caused?” John retorted.

Lucius could not possibly say anything about the event; in the end, he had fallen unconscious too quickly. However, he did have an idea of its consequences.

John bent his body and stared at Lucius’s face. He grabbed Lucius’s glasses, while Lucius shyly tried to impede him.

“Don’t worry,” John said, pushing Lucius’s hands down.

He then threw the glasses onto the table without diverting his stare. Inside Lucius’s cornea, there was a red sea about to overflow.

“I’d really like to know what’s wrong with you,” John said.

“It’s the fucking anxiety,” Brad commented, licking his fingers.

“Shut up,” John replied. “And finish that disgusting thing already!”

Indeed Lucius’s anxiety started to kick in. He felt as if the associates could hear his accelerated heartbeat, and feel its vibration on the table and on the walls of the room.

John brought his face once again to breathing distance from Lucius’s. “We lost the account.”

Lucius’s field of vision was blocked, but he heard someone stand up and walk towards him.

“Step aside,” Michael’s voice sounded serene.

John withdrew his body without taking his eyes off Lucius. Michael appeared from behind John and the speed of Lucius’s heartbeat upgraded from severe to critical. They did not stare at each other. There was a great deal of anger and fear colliding. Thus, with his hands stuck inside his pockets and looking down, Michael began his sentence.

“I wonder if you know the definition of ‘Consequentialism,’” Michael said. “Perhaps not; you’re more of a visual individual than a literary one, I guess. It consists of the reasons I justify to myself, for keeping someone like you on my staff.”

Michael started to walk behind Lucius and went towards the cabinet.

“It’s the common knowledge of ‘the end justifies the means’. So, what’s the end here?” He paused. “Our company thriving. Simple. What are the means?” He opened a drawer and grabbed a sketchbook and a pen. “Paying for your supposed talent.”

Michael turned around and stared at Lucius from a distance. He then walked over and threw the sketchbook and the pen onto the table, and in a sort of exchange, he grabbed Lucius’s glasses and held them high in the air.

“I think I know what the problem is. Let me fix these for you.”

Just by opening his hand, Michael let Lucius’s glasses fall. The impact with the floor shattered the lenses. John and Brad were amused.

Lucius bent his body down, and although his hand shook, he was able to grab the glasses. He looked at them with anger, but still, he placed them back on his face. His

heartbeat accelerated and he started to feel a bit asphyxiated. He wanted to react; he wanted to fight back, but his body was collapsing, as if a block of iron lay on his chest.

“He’s losing it,” John said.

“This is fucking pathetic,” Brad commented.

Michael raised his hand in an order for them to shut their mouths.

“I want you to draw one, just one, of the faces you saw at the meeting today,” Michael said to Lucius. “Come on, aren’t you the gifted one?”

Lucius stared at the sketchbook and the pen, his body shivering.

“You have one try,” Michael added.

Lucius did not react. On seeing his passiveness, Michael’s patience wore out. He grabbed the pen with one hand, and Lucius’s arm with the other. Lucius’s fingers were twisted.

“You probably need some motivation.” Michael let go off Lucius’s arm and placed his hand over Lucius’s chest. “Here’s something that might cheer you up.” He then closed his fist and threw a solid punch into the middle of Lucius’s ribcage.

Lucius’s body started to bend from the pain. Michael pulled Lucius’s head back, and then up, to face the white page on the sketchbook lying on the table.

“That’s the third fucking time you pull that stunt,” Michael said.

Lucius felt his blood heating up and wanted to swing his arm over Michael’s face, but it felt numb, as if it were disconnected from his body. The pressure on his chest became stronger; his heart pounded fast and violently, caused by the rush of adrenaline. Then his nose started bleeding. A drop stained the white page on the sketchbook.

“Oh, not the bleeding again,” John said.

“You didn’t hit him in the face, did you?” Brad asked.

Michael let go off Lucius, who tried to get up but collapsed onto the floor. The red drops fell from his nose and accumulated in a small puddle.

“Don’t touch him,” John said, while Michael raised his arms in the air and took a few steps backwards.

“Get the fuck out,” Michael said. “Forget this happened and don’t ever come back.”

Lucius gave him one last look and then managed to get up. With his heart beating fast and under a vertigo effect, Lucius slowly made his way out of the room, supporting himself on every piece of furniture he could find, until he arrived at the elevator.

After a while, he was able to control the bleeding and his heartrate came back to normal. Carrying his backpack, Lucius followed his route back home as if on automatic mode. He felt the closest he could be to a dead-walker. On the train, trying to cover his bloodstained shirt with his backpack, Lucius rambled on within his thoughts far more than necessary. When he realized he should get off at that station, he got up and ran, but the train doors almost chopped his nose off. When he turned around, he was forced into a visual confrontation with the remaining passengers; some of them felt sorry for him, while others just laughed.

He got off at the following station, thinking that walking back the extra distance perhaps would do him good. Nothing could be more pleasant than a walk on a beautiful evening.

On the street, the drops of water hitting the ground made a deafening noise. He ran, trying to avoid the major puddles and dodged the other people coming the opposite way. After a while, Lucius felt it again. It pinched the center of his chest and softened the grip of his hands, which made him let go of his backpack. It fell onto the wet ground and the impact ripped the fabric. A handful of small objects fell into the water current. He tried to grab them but stumbled and fell, and could only watch as the sewers swallowed them. He started to cough hard. After much coughing and spitting, with a hand still on his chest, he unrolled his body back to a normal position, a breath at a time. Body function and concentration back on track, Lucius was able to fixate his eyes on something familiar.

On a bus stop nearby, there was a high-tech three-dimensional hologram publicity device, which showed an interesting advertisement. An automobile ad consisting of the drawing of a vehicle moving fast over the surface of a calm and smooth mass of water. He did not take long to recognize that it was one of theirs—one of his creations. Suddenly, the rain became irrelevant; it already had soaked up his entire body.

He kept observing, hypnotized, until the advertisement was quickly substituted by another. The following one displayed a woman's face sleeping calmly and serenely. On her forehead, there was a thin electronic device in the form of a band, filled with little LED lights.

"Do you have problems sleeping?"

We can help you.

Come and visit us while you are awake."

In the therapy room, Lucius and the doctor sat face to face, separated by a small coffee table.

"So that's what happened to your glasses," the doctor said.

Lucius nodded, but he was embarrassed. The doctor turned his eyes to the tablet he had in hands, tapped it a few times, made a couple of notes, closed it, and then took a deep breath.

"Are you aware of what we do here?" he asked.

"Actually, no," Lucius answered, shrugging.

The doctor stared at him for a while and then got up and walked towards the door.

"Come."

They both left the room and walked through a corridor. The dark walls extended all the way to the end, where there was a wide door, which stood out due to its magnificence. It required the doctor's thumbprint confirmation and iris scan to open.

They entered a round hall that had access to other doors, each with the same security system.

"Follow me," the doctor said with an air of pride.

Lucius wanted to see it badly. The doctor proceeded with the security ritual and the following door opened. As they walked in, the lights turned on, all well choreographed. The facility's technology and complexity amazed him. It was elaborate but did not seem expensive, at first glance.

They entered the monitoring room. It had a black digital table with three chairs—which the doctor called the “control panel”—and, in front of it, a large rectangular glass that allowed a view into a second room, presented as “the session room”. Inside, there was a bed with a crystal panel over the headboard and cables attached to it. Above, on the back wall, there were three magnificent wide monitors hanging high.

The doctor glanced at Lucius and then pressed a virtual button on the control panel. On the other side, the lights turned on to reveal everything in more detail. Lucius saw that the bed had straps for the arms, legs, and waist. It was too sophisticated and adorned for shock therapy; he was sure, and relieved to know, that it was destined for something else.

“This is one of the rooms where we perform our research.” The doctor presented it while observing Lucius's astonishment.

“You have people sleep there?” Lucius asked.

“Well, we do a bit more than that,” the doctor replied with a smile, and then he pressed another set of buttons on the control panel.

The monitors inside the session room turned on. They began to light up slowly and then started to show recorded random footage. Some of them seemed to be of light content: good memories. Others were obscurer, with some surreal content: falling from high buildings, death, accidents, zombies, ghosts, werewolves, and everything there was on the book of nightmares.

“Wait a minute. Those are...”

“Reveries,” the doctor replied, interrupting Lucius. “Incepted recorded reveries. We can see and analyze them. Once we break them down, we come with proper conclusions and help the volunteers. We do everything accompanied by therapy and the footage is copyright protected—owned by the individual and reserved to us only for investigation purposes. Everyone in the staff signs a confidentiality agreement.” He then smiled. “Don't tell anyone I showed this to you.”

“But how? How... how can you record something from the mind of another person?” Lucius asked, without being able to take his eyes off the monitors.

The images were real and impactful. Lucius knew he was being presented with something extraordinary. While he enjoyed this moment of pure absorption and wonder, the doctor took a chance.

“I'd like you to try it,” he said.

Lucius turned to him. “I don't know how it's going to work with me. Since you need me to be sleeping and I happen to be unable to do that.”

“You won't exactly be sleeping,” the doctor said with another smile. “Those images were recorded in a state where the individual is on the edge of consciousness: the thin line between the inside and the outside. They're a version of your memory and your thoughts, recreated by a sophisticated technology that allows us...to watch, basically.”

That statement was indeed impressive, so was his expression of confidence.

"I'm not quite sure I want to go into that," Lucius said. "All I want is to be able to sleep, that's all."

The doctor took a deep breath. "It's your decision. I understand. But there is a great opportunity here for discovery. This is a once in a lifetime chance to move beyond, to explore. Think of your routine, the issues in the office, daily traffic, working to survive, and surviving to work. The false endless cycle that will eventually break without any warning."

The words rebounded inside Lucius's head. The doctor stared at him and then turned the monitors off.

"Think it over for the next few days. In case you change your mind, you know where to find us," he said, extending his hand.

"Thank you, doctor..."

"Carl. You can call me Carl," he answered with another charming smile.

At home, at last. The apartment was small and disorganized, with clothes tossed around, papers with drawings scattered over the coffee table, sofa, and floor. There was a shy window on the wall of the tiny living room. There was a desk dedicated to an old, long unused, typewriter. Unimaginably tired, Lucius dropped his ripped backpack on the floor, provoking a scream from a shattering glass. He then went over to the window, bending his body to be able to see outside. Over the top of the building next door he could see a little bit of the sky; unfortunately, not many stars were visible.

Lucius then dragged himself to the kitchen. He filled a glass of water and held it at eye level, looking at it as if it were the first time he had seen the liquid.

In the bathroom, his reflection in the mirror was not motivating, so he rapidly entered the shower. The sensation of the water massaging the back of his head and inhaling the vapor allowed him a bit of relaxation.

He chose soft clothes to dress. He walked around, passed by the table full of scribbled sheets of paper, and went over to the window again. Lights from the city reflected on the low hanging clouds and sounds echoed through the streets.

Back in his room, the moment had arrived. He stood in front of the bed, staring at it. The digital clock on the night table marked twelve and forty-two. With caution, and trying not to become agitated, he lifted the bedsheets and stuck himself in. He fixed his eyes on the boring white ceiling, on which there was a lonely embedded lamp. A bit of crescent moonlight entered through another small window in the bedroom and hit him in the face. He remained like that for quite some time, without moving, and trying to breathe with a constant rhythm.

The car moved fast over a highway that cut its path through a vast grass field. He woke up.

"Mom?"

"Let mom sleep, champ," his father answered.

"Did she wake up?"

"No."

A mix of fear and curiosity filled his chest. He could feel his heart beating strongly as the car advanced through the darkness. He fought exhaustion, as he wanted to be awake for the time his mother would come out of her spell. However, the hypnotizing light from the stars and the constant sound of the car's engine were as smooth and enchanting as a siren's song.

As expected, he fell freely into unconsciousness once again.