

YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE

YOUNG GOODMAN GILCHRIST

by bruce d. gilchrist

The mist fell heavily about him. Yes, it was going to be a long and cold walk home. After ascending the outside stairs from the SUB basement, he turned to face the downstairs of the Grad House. When he had last looked at the clock in the Gazette office, it had read 12:45. Perhaps there were some lost souls in the Grad House, searching at the bottom, for their bottom.

But he could not see inside. As he was bending over to look inside his lukewarm breath clouded up his glasses. The night was mystical enough without adding more alcohol. So he continued up LeMerchant Street.

The only thing he could see clearly were the flared streetlamps, incandescent despite the shrouding of the fog. Now that his glasses had cleared up, and his eyes had adjusted to the night, he realized how bright it was outside. And how eerie as well. For he was the only soul in sight. Other than him, the streets were empty, what little he could see of them, seventy-five yards perhaps. Traipsing past the history department's green facade, he reached inside the faded Levi 501's and brought out the knife he was carrying.

It was a sliding Exacto knife. They used them at the Gazette to slice up the stories and photographs before laying them out in their soon to be granted immortality. He held onto the black plastic guard, and put his thumb on the white serially ridged pad meant for his thumb.

At the corner of Coburg and LeMerchant he looked down the four streets. In every direction, it was downhill for the ribbons of road. Downhill into a tree and house lined uncertainty.

Brisking up the pace he chose the path down LeMerchant, for it was the only one without the glaring orange streetlights. With the increased pace, came an increase in the "Thrthruupppttt!" of the Exacto knife. He held it at his side, hand extended, palm upright, and then swung quickly in an uppercut fashion. If spectres were to appear before him, he would be prepared; vorpak blade in hand.

In the middle of a series of houses on the right side of the street, stood out a faded brown. Unaware of the aspect of particular importance that caught his eye, he froze his body and took two deep mist-filling lungfuls of air. He unwillingly blinked both eyes, and saw the flaw. The lowermost left window was broken. It seemed as if a deliberate cut had been made upon the pane as an elliptical portion was missing, while the rest was intact. It wasn't perfect, but it closely resembled the path of a comet.

It couldn't have possibly been made by a child's errant rock throw, could it? It then dawned up him that something more sinister could be involved. The space in the pane was big enough for a cat to use. For a familiar to use.

Shaking off the thought he continued down towards the school at the end of the T where LeMerchant met Watt. He did not need to think of such thoughts. Thoughts that were beyond his control. Against these, he had no defences. Not even a razor sharp retractable Exacto knife.

"If spectres were to appear before him, he would be prepared; vorpak blade in hand."

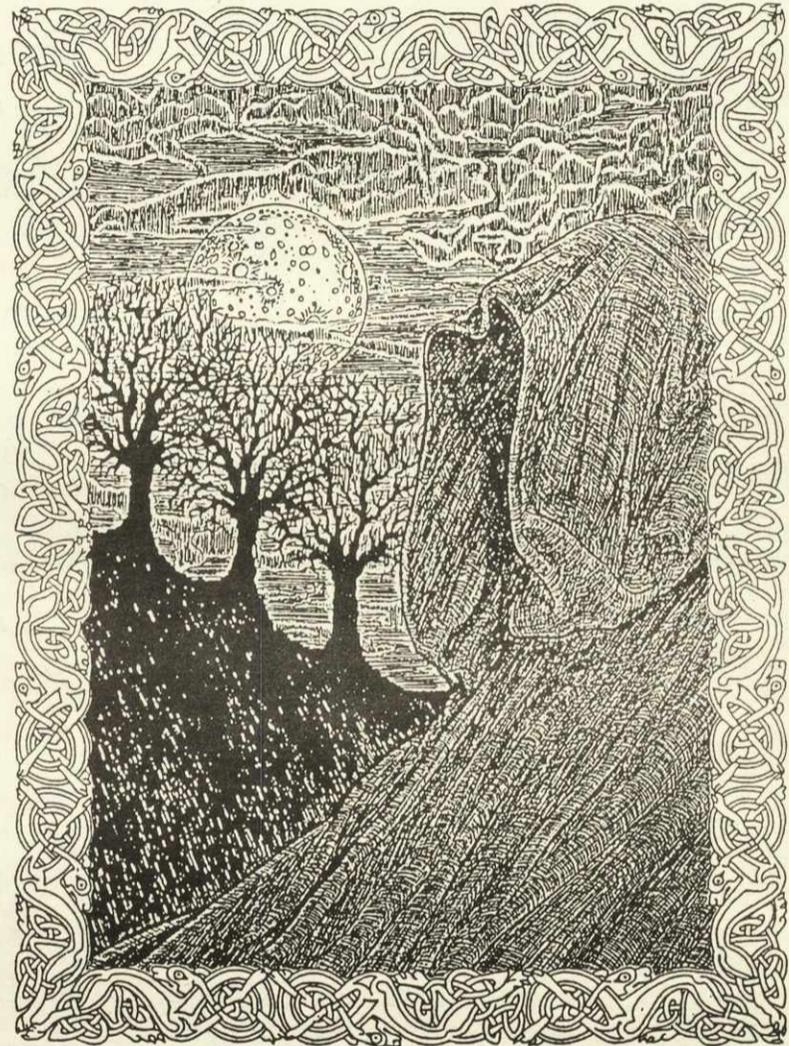
Looking down Watt he found no traveller either behind or ahead of him. And no felines over his shoulder.

It was then that he heard it- the dull roar. Unable to pinpoint its direction he gazed furiously up and down Watt Street. He knew the noise. It was like the dull roar of a jet engine slowly taxiing its way out before takeoff. Some creature possessed its soul, for the evil machinations of the whirring machine frightened him to his bloodless marrow. He knew this noise. It was the noise that made Dutch families huddle in mortared basements as the machines rolled by on metallic tracks. Their machines were German tanks, the metal wheels cracking on the cobblestones at the eye-level of the frightened people transfixed in their view of fear- separated only by a pane.

His machine lay behind him, and was gaining. It had breached the crest of the hill, and rolled on towards him, hissing viciously. Hearing the scraping of sidewalk, he turned rapidly and was instantly emblazoned in the monstrosity's rotating orange safety lights. It was the terrible streetcleaning machine.

Startled by just how vivid his imagination had become, he realized his silliness and chuckled, although no sound was made. The streetcleaner whirred passed him, splashing his feet, as the streetgrime was cleansed. The machine really was monstrous in design- he had not imagined one to resemble its present form. Orange rails extruded, and strange raised orange bumps could be seen, but nowhere was the driver visible.

He followed the light as it circled its way to the end of the street. Then, amazingly, it performed a pirouette and with astonishing agility reversed its direction and continued up the street it had just come



down. All the while, removing the history laid down by the day's dust.

He crossed over the street and could feel the purple cold of the school's brick walls upon him. What kind of a school was this? It was closer to a Victorian nightmare than a school. Not wanting to take his eyes off the evil apparition that was the school, he backed up through an empty parking lot and an empty asphalt playground, unable to remove the school from his focus. Until he stepped on the green.

He felt the wet ground give softly beneath his feet. Ah Earth!!! The expansive field seemed to stretch for miles. He could not see the end of it for the fog, but surely it could hold hundreds of children's spirits within its verdant range. Eerily aglow, the field restored his vision and brought warmth to his bones. He ran out to its middle, imagining a soccer match. As he got closer to the center, the field became brighter. How was this so?

He looked up. The engorged moon sat loftily overhead presently free from obstruction. Earth's offspring was the reason for the brightness of the pitch. Held by the fullness of its grasp, he stood craning his neck. He saw a cloud quickly approaching the orb. The vortex was closing and soon the moon would be itself enshrined in the oppressive late evening mist. His glance falling ahead of him now, he searched for a horizon, but there was none.

Above him the sky grew dark, or the true character of the night appeared. Decimated by the loss of the giving source, he looked back in frustration at the forbidding school. But it too was lost. Gone, vanished, disappeared in the night. Just how far away was he now from the school?

With faith he looked up at the sky above him and silently banished the moon forever, distrustful of its feminine nature. He then put his head down, and awaited a response.