

**2007-2008
CBC Writing Competition**

Junior Level Entry
Category: Fiction
Author: Jeremy TeGrotenhuis

Mokroth

1

There is a thin line in this world, between what we consider the natural and what we call the supernatural. The truth is - it's all natural, and the two halves affect each other. I know this from personal experience. I have a bizarre connection to the half most disregard. I can see things, usually out of the corner of my eye, which people would lock me up for claiming to have seen. There are probably asylums full of people with similar talent who simply didn't have the instruction I've had. What I can see - what I've seen - since the summer of 1993, is so unbelievable, I myself considered the visions a sign of lunacy.

School had just ended and my friends and I were still making plans for the vacation. Most 14 year olds at the time were concerned with girls, sports, and *Super Nintendos*. I was a little odd; I liked art. Not just any art, I liked drawings of everyday people, doing everyday things. I would sit in the park for hours watching people, encapsulating their behavior and appearance in my mind's eye then recreating it in a sketch-book.

I was sitting on a bench, in Brooksdale Park, my backpack beside me, pencil in hand, and a notebook on my lap. Weddings and Church Socials were held here, little kids had their birthday parties in this park, and Jewish kids had their Bar Mitzvahs, as my friend Vinny Griersky had last year.

I had just finished a drawing of a lady walking a miniature poodle on the grass, not the path, which I thought odd, when I saw a splash of gray in the corner of my eye. I don't

know why it caught my attention; it's possible that the dull color stood out from the mostly vibrant summer backdrop; it may have been fate. It's hard to figure it out, looking back. I turned to focus on the color, and was caught off guard by a most disturbing sight. For a split second, my eyes deigned to see the blurry image of a very thin naked man, sans genitalia, whose face looked like nothing but a skull with a pair of pointed ears, a hooked nose, and blood-red lips glued on.

I never got a chance to focus on the figure; as soon as I tried to take a close look at it, the image dissolved, and all that stood in its wake was Mr. Hausted, the town banker, trotting down the path in a blue sweat suit. I stared at him for at least a full minute, wondering if the thing I had just seen would reappear.

I started drawing like my life itself depended on the swift completion of this latest artistic endeavor. The image of the thing, though I had only glimpsed it for a second, was burned fresh in my mind, and I wanted to draw it before it faded. My pencil was a blur on the page as I sketched line after line, erasing ones that didn't fit and leaving ones to use later.

When I had finished I gazed at the graphite on the paper in a daze. Was that what I had seen; that freakish man with the pointy nose and the red lips, which I had colored black for lack of a red pencil? What was it? Had I even seen it? I had, hadn't I?

My hand reached out without me telling it to, to rip the page out of my book. I stopped myself, I don't know why, maybe fate again. I stuffed my notebook into my backpack and stood up as fast as I could. I wanted to get out of the park, away from whatever craziness I'd stumbled into.

I slipped my pencil into my pocket, shrugged on my pack, and headed home. The whole way I had my head down, studying the grass, and then the side walk. Not watching where I was going was a habit of mine, a weird one my mother would have killed to have

me break. I still look at the ground when I walk; you never know what kind of good fortune you'll bump into.

On that day, the fortune I bumped into was especially good, and terrifying. About a block from my house a foot suddenly entered my down facing field of vision. I heard a surprised "whoop!", and I found myself in a collision with a rather tall man. I was walking fast, and I wasn't a small kid, so when I bumped into people, I really bumped into them. On this occasion, I nearly knocked my bump-target over.

He grabbed my arm to steady himself, and almost pulled me over with him. When we'd stabilized, I looked up and muttered a sincerely ashamed "Sorry mister," all at the same time. What my eyes showed me was a twig of a man in a navy-blue unbuttoned trench coat, still ruffled from our collision and adjusting a crooked fedora. He chuckled, which was odd. Normally adults yelled at insolent kids who dared bump into them.

He patted my head with a work-gloved hand, still chuckling, and smiling, I noticed. He had huge white teeth set against a tan face. A few strands of black hair were wandering from beneath his fedora, and one crossed his twinkling green left eye. He looked like a holly-jolly mafia member.

The most surprising thing was his voice. After a few seconds of chuckling, he reassured me in a voice that sounded like velvet mixed with Jim's accent from The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

"Ees no problem, li'l mon! Ah look at mah feet alla time when ah walk! Sometime, the groun's more intrestin' den dah sky!"

He chuckled again, then put his hands in his pockets and continued on his path of travel. I watched him till he rounded the corner, then started back home.

My home was a wreck of a place. I was an only child, which was unusual in

Brooksdale. What was worse: my dad walked out on me and my mom when I was five. My mom wasn't a huge fan of our situation, especially considering she had to work two shifts waiting tables at Rick's Diner, run by the town pervert Rick Reynold, to put food on our table and pay the mortgage. This of course, meant I was home alone quite a lot. Fortunately, my mother had not qualms about letting me have friends over, as long as they were male, when she was gone.

I walked into the house, which was badly in need of cleaning, and made a b-line for the kitchen. My mother and I communicated mainly through post-its she slapped on the fridge, and teacher's notes/report card's I put on the table for her to read and sign.

On the fridge, an old rusty thing which would let milk spoil if it wasn't imbibed in three days and spoiled eggs seemingly the instant they were put in the bloody thing, was a yellow post-it reading: "Mac 'N Cheese on the stove. Vincent can come over after you eat."

I ignored the other three notes, with deep messages such as "I Love You" and "Make Sure To Finish Your Homework Before You Watch TV." Most of the notes survived for months after they were posted.

I grabbed the pot of lukewarm macaroni and parked myself on the couch. I turned on the tube and flipped around till I found an old horror movie, the only thing ever worth watching on our cable-less TV. It was *Village of the Damned*. I wolfed down the Mac, which had hot dogs cut up in it, and called Vinny.

"Hey Vinny, wanna come over?"

"Sure. Hey, I just bought *Blade Runner*. It only ran me 2 bucks on sale at the gas station. Want me to bring it over?"

"kay."

"Awesome! Seeya!"

20 minutes later Vinny was at my front door, holding a VHS tape of *Blade Runner* triumphantly, like a trophy tracked down by a hunter. It was his All-Time-Favorite-Movie. Mine was Star Wars. We both liked Harrison Ford; he was Vinny's hero.

We sat down on the couch and watched. About a half-hour later, I grabbed my notebook and started flipping through it. I came to the drawing of the thing I'd seen in the park. I stared at it, mesmerized. Vinny saw it from his seat next to me.

"Whatcha got there?"

"Oh, nothing. Just something I imagined."

I watched the rest of *Blade Runner*. Damn, Harrison Ford was cool.

3

The next day I went back to the park. I sat back down on the bench and took out my notebook, but didn't draw anything. I just stared at the picture, captivated. What I'd seen seemed so real, but the figure in the drawing seemed so...impossible. I was crazy; I was sure of it - seeing things, probably from watching too many late-night horror movies.

Then it happened again, that glint of gray in the corner of my eye. I snapped my head up. It was Rick Reynold in all his greasy glory. His hair was slicked back, and he was jogging in a gray tank-top and short-shorts. He thought he was some kind of hot-shot, assumed all the ladies couldn't get enough of him. Turns out they all hated his guts, but half the eligible women in Brooksdale worked in his diner and couldn't insult him for fear of losing their jobs.

Vinny's older sister, Tina, came running in his direction. She was an exercise nut, owned one of those giant rubber balls and half the work-out videos ever made, and right then Rick Reynold was giving her the eye. Not the stink eye, or the evil eye, the eye the high-school quarterback gives the head cheerleader before going out to make a big play.

Then it happened, something far more terrifying than that first glimpse of the monsters that would hence-forth haunt my life. Rick suddenly changed, right before my eyes, into a gray man. It was sudden, just like when the gray man had become Mr. Hausted. He changed in mid-stride, the gray man took two steps, smiling a huge, black-toothed grin, then changed back into Rick Reynold as fast as Rick had first transformed.

I watched Rick jog off, scared out of my wits. I watched him, waiting for it to happen again.

"So, choo can see dem?"

I whipped my head around and nearly fell off the bench. The bean-pole man in the coat and fedora was standing behind me, hands planted in his pockets, smile gone from his face. I tried to reply, to deny whatever accusation he was making, distance myself from whatever was happening.

But all I could stammer was "Wha...whaa..." over and over again.

"Ah saw jour drawin'. Ees very gut. Choo should find a career in ahrt."

"Tha..thank you..." I murmured, barely audibly.

"Ah assume choo don' know what dey ahre?"

I could only shake my head. My voice had completely abandoned me.

"Follah me, we can' talk heah."

He turned on his heel and walked off toward the woods in the south end of the park. I nearly jumped off the bench, and almost fell again, before chasing after him.

We walked in silence. Several times I started to ask a question, and was met with a raspy "shh". When we were deep in the woods he stopped, turned to face me, and squatted down to meet my eye-line.

"Choo see da' Mokroth?"

"What?" I was lost.

"Da ting in jour pitchure. A Mokroth. Das wa' is called."

"Mokroth?"

"Ja, we been ovah daht."

I was still pretty lost.

"What..."

"Ja?"

"What are they?"

He paused. Then, choosing his words carefully, spoke.

"Der' like demons. Dark tings dah wannah hurt choo, alla choo pepal. Dey hurt mah pepal." He paused again. "Dey cohmed to a world from who knos where, dey wach fo' a while, wachen waht da pepal in da worlt do, an memorizen waht all da pepal do. Den dey change. Dey become jus' like da pepal, jus' like 'em, mos' pepal can' no tell deh diffrence."

He paused again. Just squatting there, staring into my eyes with his no-longer twinkling green ones.

"They look just like normal people, like the replicants in *Blade Runner*." I said.

He nodded.

"When enuf a dem come to a worlt, dey staht doin' tings, destabalizin' de normal tings in dah worlt, makin' everytin crazy."

His face took on an especially solemn look. He stopped talking altogether, not just a pause - it seemed as though he couldn't make himself go on. A tear slid down his cheek, and his bottom lip quivered.

"When...when dey've done daht, is only a mattah of time befo' de hole worlt just...goes away. Somtimes is fast an' furious, wars an' earthquakes an' fires foh no reason. While de worlt is endin' dey leave."

He pounded his chest with one of his gloved hands.

“Dey deed it to mah wort. I follot 'em. I been trakin' em. Foun' ways tah keel 'em.”

He pulled aside his trench coat, revealing a massive holstered silver plated pistol.

“I nevah foun' anotha' person what can' see dem. Wahn deed it staht fo' choo?”

“Just...just yesterday.”

He nodded again. Then his eyes opened wide, wider than I'd ever seen a man's eyes open, except in Saturday morning cartoons. He drew the pistol and held it in front of him with both hands. I saw that it was much larger than any gun I'd ever seen, in real life or the movies.

“Waht choo want?” He demanded. I turned about tentatively. Standing there, beneath an old oak tree, was Rick Reynold, still grinning. But it wasn't Rick Reynold, or at least, not the Rick Reynold my mother thought she worked for. This wasn't even a human, it was a 'Mokroth'.

The Mokroth walked slowly toward us, grinning that stupid grin Rick always wore. I caught a glimpse of the monster beneath the costume, and saw the infinitely more sinister bloody-lipped manic smile of the Mokroth.

The Mokroth started flickering between it's two appearances, monster and man, at an increasingly rapid pace, all the while walking slowly towards us, stretching it's arms out to it's sides.

There was a huge boom and a flash of light, like a firework misfiring, the Mokroth's left shoulder erupted in a fountain of purplish blood. A scream rent the air, and my eardrums. I fell to the ground, clasping my hands over my ears and clenching my eyes tight. There were three more booms, then I felt a strong hand on my shoulder. I was lifted bodily from the ground and pulled so hard I thought my arm would dislocate.

“We gottah goh!”

The man in the trench coat led me deeper into the woods. I kept my eyes glued to the path in front of me, trying not to trip over the debris in the path.

The man fired shot after shot from his huge pistol, and each was met with a terrible scream. The booms pounded the inside of my skull, the screams seemed to burn my brain. It felt like I was dragged for hours, like there were thousands of booms and thousands of screams. I kept thinking, "How many can there be?" and "How many shots does he have?" Then the sounds stopped. And then I stopped.

I looked up. We stood in a clearing about 15 feet across. I've been back to that clearing and measured it. Many times.

The world seemed completely silent, then my ears stopped ringing and I heard the clicks.

Click Click Click

I stood behind him. He held both hands before him, pulling the trigger of the gun over and over. Each time there was only a click.

I stepped out from behind him. Dozens of Mokroth corpses were spread about, slowly dissolving and being blown away by the wind like dust. One remained standing.

The Mokroth was in its full-on true form. This one wasn't grinning.

It screamed, tearing my brain, then charged.

The man in the trench coat and fedora roared. It sounded like a lion issuing a challenge. He ran towards the Mokroth. He looked fearless, consumed by rage. It was a terrible, heroic sight.

Just before the two collided, the man flicked his wrist. A switchblade of blue crystal slid into his hand. He released the blade and brought his arm up with astonishing speed.

The Mokroth drove its arm through the man's chest.

The man thrust the blade through the Mokroth's chin.

The two fell to the ground, locked together. I heard a gurgle, and the Mokroth began dissolving.

I ran over to the man, bawling in fear. Blood was pouring from his chest and his mouth. Rich, ruby-red blood. The brightest blood I've ever seen.

He spoke, but only in a whisper. I bent down to his face so I could hear him, tears dripping from my chin.

"Li'l mon..." he whispered. "Wha's jour name, li'l mon..."

I sobbed, then replied. "Jack...Jack Henricks."

"Jack..." he grinned. "Nice name..."

He coughed on me. My face was splattered with blood.

"Jack...take dah knife..."

I shook my head. "I can't. My mother'll take it away."

He chuckled. "Den don' let 'er see it."

I picked up the knife and slipped it in my pocket.

"Ees killt one 'o dem. Dey won' touch choo if choo hold it."

He coughed one last time, then died.