

## THE CANYON IS POSSESSED

This is the story of a dark wooded canyon. It is an area that is shrinking as the village around it grows larger and brighter. And as it shrinks, its myths are buried, rewritten, replaced, hidden in caves and forgotten. The pictures taken here in the past disappear now in the floodlights of massive helicopters. The devil will have to move out, along with the druids, ghosts, teenage vampires, graffiti rats, bums, bigfoots, UFOs and high school jocks. But for now this is still their land, if not solely by possession. It has become my recent passion to explore the place again to find out what actually happened. My goal was to visit the main features of the canyon – the secret sidewalk, the water temple, the teddy bear tree and the radical rectangle. I felt that if I could survive the night, then I could uncover some of the mysteries of this place.

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My earliest memories of the canyon are of driving through it at night with my mom. It's probably 1972 or 1973. It's pitch black, but the lights of our little yellow VW bug shine on the oak trees as we drive down the windy road. We drive through Sunol, a town infamous for electing a dog as its mayor, and into the mouth of the canyon as it leads to Niles. I remember my mom telling me there was a white witch out there somewhere. That's the story about the hitchhiking woman dressed all in white who mysteriously disappears from the car when you reach her requested destination. She also told me about the other witches out there in the hills.

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Devil's Workshop is an old headshop that opened near

the canyon in 1969. When I returned there recently I was greeted by the familiar wooden indian at the door. Inside this windowless firetrap building was every variety of smoking device, snorting device and rolling device – all for ingesting drugs. A variety of Oakland Raiders paraphernalia, cheap lingerie, biker decorations, t-shirts, skulls, silver goblets, turquoise jewelry, incense and cheap rock posters were for sale. There were no funny ‘Dr. Seuss’ hats or glowy raver orbs that you might find at Spencer Gifts – no, there was just hardcore biker and stoner shit there.

I remembered how my mom bought me my first bong at Devil’s when I turned sixteen. It was shaped like an ergonomic stick-shift kind of thing, and it shined with a black opalescent glaze. It looked like an oil spill. I was embarrassed that my mom bought it for me and I barely used it because I preferred pipes and joints.

“Do you have any of those big plastic joint smoking things?” I asked the guy behind the counter. ” It’s shaped like a water bottle but you put a doobie in the end of it and squeeze it so it fills up with smoke. Do you know what I’m talking about?”

The gray-haired biker dude behind the counter looked up from his portable black and white TV and told me that they had stopped selling them years ago.

“We got these roach stones, though.”

He got up from his stool and pointed to a bunch of ceramic and stone discs in the display case.

“That’s cool,” I said. “What about the Secret Sidewalk? You know anything about that place?”

“That party spot?” he looked at me sideways. “It’s just a place where people go to party I guess...and the tunnels are pretty cool to check out. My old pal Halfbeak used to run the little snack bar out there near the bend in the river where people used to go swimming. Half his face was gone. Just a hole there. He said it was from the Second World War, but the rumor around the canyon was

that he was running with some creepy older dudes who lived up in the darkest parts of the canyon.”

“Near the JR Ranch?” I asked cautiously.

“How do you know about the JR Ranch?”

“My mom mentioned it once,” I told him.

The truth was I don’t know how I knew about the JR Ranch. I encountered the name on a website and somehow a flood of images came to my mind – Control and ecological awareness of the environment. Shrinking darkness seeking protection from a barbaric civilization hung up on automatic experiences. Natural highs. Black robes. Bloodletting. Babies making babies. Missing Youth. Youth is missing. Youth is feeling death and not missing anything.

“Yeah, well your mom was pretty fucking crazy,” he said.

“I go out there every once in a while to go drink blood. They have some pretty good bands play out there too,” he said.

“Never heard of it,” he said.

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The night was still young, as I walked along the road toward the canyon. I was getting hungry but I kept going. A mirage of an old hamburger stand formed in front of me – a place called Big Daddy’s that served up burgers, dogs and shakes. This was the meeting place for teenage groups before they headed out into the dark crevices of the canyon to dance naked and drink copious amounts of beer and blood. There is nothing like this in the landscape now. Instead, there is a 7-11 and a nail shop at a mini-mall at the same intersection. Recently, the 7-11 was held up by a gang of Filipino youths who wore plastic milk crates over their heads. I bought a microwave burrito and some corn chips. I asked the guy behind the counter if he knew anything about the canyon.

He told me that a group of older men with 4×4 vehicles would often come into the store early on Sunday mornings. It was obvious that they had been out all night in the canyon – their boots bloodied and dirty, their vehicles covered in black blood. Slaughtered deer or other small animals dripped more blood from the roofs of the vehicles and stained the sun bleached asphalt of the parking lot. It looked a lot like oil. Another time he watched a group of teenagers carry an unconscious woman from a car in the direction of the railroad tracks and toward the notorious Secret Sidewalk which ran along the side of the canyon.

I asked the clerk if he ever saw a man who wore all purple clothing.

“Oh, you mean Gary,” the clerk said.

“Yes, Gary Hanu!” I said.

“Yeah. Funny guy. He comes in here all the time before he heads into the canyon. He buys herbal tea and menthols. I heard he moved to India.”

“Yeah, he’s an interesting guy,” I said.

“He talks to aliens,” the clerk said.

“That’s what I heard.”

I first encountered Gary Hanu on the Secret Sidewalk bulletin board that I started in 1998. I started the bulletin board to try to find information about the Secret Sidewalk and Niles canyon. The replies varied from anonymous teenage partiers to tales of druids and human sacrifice.

But Gary Hanu was different. His messages on the board had a certain urgency. He contacted me personally via e-mail in 1999. He warned of the negative energy in the canyon and directed me to his own web page (*as of April 2006, a dead link –ed.*). On his web page, where he offered free dream interpretations and posted numerous pages of writing about his UFO experiences, he told a story of youth: When he was a young man, he went up to the secret sidewalk with a couple of friends to party.

Apparently one of his friends had a verbal confrontation with some men dressed in black robes. A little later that evening, after getting fucked up on drugs and alcohol, this same friend fell off the Secret Sidewalk to his death. His heart exploded.

I also found posts about the Secret Sidewalk that Gary made on a bulletin board hosted by the New Energy Mystical Movement. Here members posted locations they felt needed “gifting” of Transmagon energy. Transmagon energy was first discovered by the artist Ferg Dewitt in upstate New York in the late 1960’s. DeWitt, along with another artist, John Grover, conducted experiments in the field with charged polygonal forms. The forms are charged through movement in the natural environment.

“Something happens when the area is gifted with Transmagon energy,” Gary wrote. “The form completely illuminates the entire story. It radiates outward to the hands which hold this very volume, and radiate out further through your brain out into the world. Use the power of Transmagon energy to change the world you live in and keep the spirits alive.”

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Energized by my meal and armed with a customized Transmagon form, I chose to try to walk to the canyon – only about a half mile away. I decided to approach from the train tracks, rather than down the side road with all the NO TRESPASSING signs.

As I walked along the tracks, I was visited by the ghost of my parent’s friend, Peanut, who hung out a lot at our place when we lived by the railroad tracks. He was a fat black dude who drove a Monte Carlo. I was 7 years old when one day, I followed the railroad tracks to try to find the Secret Sidewalk and I got lost. I crossed a creek and walked down to the road. Suddenly, Peanut pulled over in his big burgundy colored car and asked me what I was

doing. I told him that I was lost, looking for the Secret Sidewalk. He offered to give me a ride home. I got in and he drove down a side road into the dark canyon.

I knew that when he picked me up, I was pretty close to my house, and I was just confused. I knew that he was driving me further away. I asked him to drive me back to my house. He kept his eyes on the road and asked me if I knew where we were.

“Do you know where your house is?” he asked. “Where are we now?”

We saw some lights in the sky, following us. Peanut pulled the car over. We got out by the snack bar, where the playground was at. It was getting dark and the snack bar was closed. There was no moon out that night, but a bare bulb was shining by the counter of the snack bar. It made it harder to see what was beyond us, out there in the dark. We just sat there at one of the picnic tables while peanut drank some beers and we listened to Santana on the radio.

‘...Got a Black Magic Woman.  
I got a Black Magic Woman.  
Yes, I got a Black Magic Woman,  
She’s got me so blind I can’t see;  
But she’s a Black Magic Woman and  
she’s trying to make a devil out of me.....’

Peanut got out a set of bongos and started playing. Soon a band showed up and they all started playing together. They were all getting really high and playing really fucked-up music. There were also a bunch of nude mannequins out there in the woods. I was wondering when my mom was going to show up. I started seeing figures moving around in the dark so I got into Peanut’s car and fell asleep in the back seat.

The kids were horse-playing around the campfire earlier on and now they were restricted to staying in the tent for the rest of the night. They were bored as they listened to the grown-ups sitting around drinking and smoking. In the tent they found the gun under a pillow. They were both laughing and teasing each other for being so naughty. The girl pointed the gun at her little brother and pulled the trigger as a joke. A flash went off in the tent and mom came running to find the kids sitting quietly. They didn't want to get in trouble for bleeding in the tent so they stopped.

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Peanut ended leading me over to the Secret Sidewalk, which leads me to believe he also knew the location when he was alive. He disappeared, or rather I lost track of him, as we got close to the dilapidated brick factory. There was no one else there.

I climbed up to the "sidewalk," a long piece of pipe encased in cement that runs through the canyon. At one point there is a hole in the top of it. I climbed inside and took some pictures. There was some regular spray-painted graffiti – LED ZEPPELIN RULES – – – FOGHAT – – – – – SCOTT LOVES MARIE... Some graffiti tags of a contemporary urban style. But then I noticed a sigil painted in what appeared to be black tar. I took a picture of it to look at later. I also found a fragment of a mirror down there.

I took the Transmagon form out of its aluminum case and charged the area for about 10 minutes. Satisfied, I decided to walk further down the sidewalk, past where it is all broken up, and try to find where it starts up again in the canyon.

It was here that I encountered the Troll, near the stone railroad bridge. His home was a blue tarp tied between some oak trees, with a few madrones serving as his front

yard. A small mutt yapped at me, and I noticed a campfire not far off.

“Isn’t your name Mike?” he asked me.

“Uh yeah,” I said, quietly startled.

“My name is Billy,” he said.

“It seems you are the right age now,” he said.

“The right age for what?” I asked.

“To take the communion,” he said, and he handed me a stick of gum.

I chewed the gum and he led me to a little courtyard where I sat down in a little folding chair. The courtyard was well cared for and filled with other trolls, all sitting around reading newspapers. I picked up a newspaper and started reading about the war in Iraq. I felt a tingling on my face, and discovered that my beard started growing at a tremendous rate. My hands, which were holding the paper, started to shrink and wither. My fingers became stubby and coarse. When I finished the newspaper article, I looked up to realize that I had become a troll too. I started to freak out and I ran back to the troll’s house. He consoled me and gave me a couple of Advils and a drink of some clear liquid in a Gatorade bottle (probably water), and I started returning to normal.

Suddenly, a hungry mountain lion lurched through the trees, quietly leaping down on the poor Troll’s dog, tearing it to bloody shreds in front of us. The Troll started whacking the mountain lion with a monkey wrench, but the animal would not let go of the dog. The dog was definitely dead. Finally, I got out my glock and capped that mountain lion in the ass. Then I got my shit and ran. I just couldn’t deal.

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A hillside is burning and Sean watches from a distance. He’s jacking off furiously to the rising flames, like he’s mad at his dick. He’s beating the shit out of it. He’s lis-

tening to some metal on his headphones. He's imagining his father, a village firefighter, engulfed in the flames. He shoots his load, and when he's done he smokes a couple Marlboro lights and rides his bike home to eat dinner. In a few months time, after he gets caught, his new nickname will be Firehacker.

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When I finally left the sidewalk, I was very tired. I was also a little scared. I walked over the ridge and found something that I was dreading I might.

My mom told me a story once about Howard, our neighbor when we lived by the railroad tracks. Howard was a greasy biker dude who always wore a baseball hat and thick glasses. One time, mom said, Howard took her out in the canyon to a secret garden – a labyrinth made from finely manicured bushes, about 5 feet high. She followed the dirt paths with Howard, as he explained that this was the location of the secret ritual group that had been active in the canyon. He said that “bad things” happened there. She said she was scared by the vibes of the place and she tried to purify the place with her crystals and prayers. This story did not surprise me, as there are many stories of ritual groups and their use of labyrinths.

What did surprise me was the group of people not far away, some dressed in black, with flashlights. I could hear the voices of teenagers, loud and shrill. I heard a girl scream. One girl was wearing a white wedding gown, standing by the side of the road smoking a cigarette. Although I knew she was really just a teenage girl, I thought she looked a lot like the White Witch. I decided to stay put and watch what happened next. They seemed to be doing some kind of secret thing.

Suddenly, a boy yelled out, “Here comes one!” and he ran down the side of a hill into the darkness. A few moments later, a car's headlights shone on a group of

eucalyptus trees. The girl wearing all white started slowly walking down the road toward the lights, clutching a bouquet of indiscriminate flowers. The car approached, a Nissan Maxima, and slowed for a moment as it turned the corner. As the driver registered the haunting white figure in his view, he put on the brakes and then suddenly flashed the White Witch with his high beams. The White Witch walked toward the car and the driver suddenly gassed the car and swerved around her. The teen witch turned around as the car shot past and raised her arms up like a crucified woman. She looked really scary.

As the car lights faded, I could hear the voices and laughter of the other teenagers as they came rustling out of the darkness with their beer bottles and flashlights.

I thought it was funny to see this group of kids pulling a prank in the canyon. I'd discussed the possibility of pulling such a prank with a young filmmaker named Abraham – "Skell," as he was known to his friends. Skell worked at a nearby movie theater by day and wrote screenplays at night. He was in production on a movie about the White Witch, which at the time of this writing remains unfinished.

"It's impossible to shoot in the canyon at night," Skell told me. "We couldn't get the permits or pay the cost of security to shoot anything in the canyon or at the Secret Sidewalk," he explained.

Skell also approached the owner of one of the legendary biker bars nearby, (the one across the street from Devil's Workshop) about shooting some footage there. The owner, a surly biker, agreed to the shooting with a few impossible conditions: It had to be shot during working hours; it couldn't interrupt his business at the bar; and the jukebox had to stay on, no matter what. Obviously the guy was fucking with him.

But perhaps one of the biggest setbacks was the death of Joe, the production manager of the film, and Skell's closest supporter of the film. Joe died from a heart condi-

tion while on his lunch break at his day job. Uncannily, Joe died in the time period that the White Witch is alleged to make her appearance, mid-February.

While doing research on the canyon, Skell interviewed a police officer who told him that the canyon was dangerous – it was not only the location of numerous car accidents, but also the location of a rash of grisly murders of young women, mostly around 2001.

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In 1980 she was living in Idaho, after escaping the canyons of California. She was working at a gem shop during the day, and getting beat up by him every night. He was drinking and not working. His bike was in the shop back at the canyon, and she was saving the money to have it fixed. He was raised as an evangelical baptist, but at some point he was possessed by the devil. He soon got mixed up with bike gangs and heavy dudes. Finally she got sick of the beatings so she took off back to California and somehow saved up the money to get his bike fixed. Somehow she still felt obligated to pay for his bike. He went back to the canyon to get his bike, and then they met in a bar in Sacramento. While at the bar, she took off with her two kids and the truck and trailer. She just ditched him. She felt so good.

About two and a half hours later she was running out of gas on her way over the Altamont pass. When she ran out of gas, she got out with her kids and just left the truck and trailer (no tail lights) in the road. She ran with her kids to a farmhouse and called the cops. The cops came and gave her enough gas to get to a friend's house in the canyon. So she was super stoked, left her kids at the farmhouse and went to a party in the canyon and sang and played guitars all night. Life was all about singing and playing and dancing. The next morning she left to go pick up her kids and when she returned a day later, she

discovered that after she left, the place had been raided because it was a meth lab. Then she discovered that she lost her most prized possession. Her 12 string Fender acoustic had been ripped off by her girlfriend when she escaped the bust.

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The water temple is in Sunol, an area originally settled by the Ohlone tribe about 5,000 years ago. The Ohlone lived in small villages with well-defined territorial boundaries. Because of the gentle climate, they often wore no clothing except for a buckskin cape. Their culture was highly developed and stable in this plentiful land teeming with wildlife – vultures, newts, mountain lions, hawks, dragonflies. A bountiful yield of plant and animal foods was ensured by careful management of the land. Controlled burning of extensive areas was carried out each fall to promote the growth of seed-bearing annual plants as well as to increase the grazing areas for deer, elk and antelope. Although they tasted like shit, acorns from the many oaks were a staple plant food. When the Mission San Jose was established by the Spanish, the Ohlone population fell from about 10,000 to 2,000 within 60 years, mostly as a result of contracting European diseases, rape and human sacrifice.

The Sunol Water Temple was designed by Willis Polk in 1910 and built by the Spring Valley Water Company. Polk's design, modeled after the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, Italy, was constructed in 1910 (Tivoli is where much of the waters that fed Rome came together in the foothills of the Apennines ). The 18-meter high classical pavilion is made up of 12 concrete Corinthian columns and a concrete ring girder that supports the conical wood and tile roof. At one time it was adorned with mystical symbols, Egyptian mostly. Now the roof covering the cistern has paintings depicting Indian maidens

carrying water vessels.

Inside the temple, the waters from the area converge on this spot, drop 40 feet into a conduit and head for San Francisco through Niles Canyon and across the bay. The city of San Francisco bought the Spring Valley Water Company in 1930. It is these pipes that make up the legendary Secret Sidewalk.

Could it be that the White Witch is a water sprite, a form that asks for a ride to its final destination through the canyon?

an inscription on the temple reads-

“I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry lands springs of water.

The streams whereof shall make glad the city. s.v.w.c. MCMX”

s.v.w.c. is for Spring Valley Water Company.

MCMX is 1910.

The first line is from Isaiah 41:18b

The second line is from Psalm 46:4

The air here smells like it has a green electric charge. I remove the Transmagon from its aluminum case, and commit some movements in the adjacent area.

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There is a serial killer in the small village. He sneaks into children's bedrooms at night and steals them away. He takes their toys and their clothing too. He gives the stuff away to other people so they think he is a good guy, and nobody suspects a thing. When he is done raping a child, he hangs their teddy bears on a tree by the side of the road in the canyon, just past the water temple. This is meant as a warning to all children.

The teddy bear tree is nothing much to look at. It's just a small scrubby bush on a hillside. Ribbons and tinsel on the tree flutter in the wind during the day and during the night. There are, at last count, 26 stuffed animals hung

from the tree. They are indescribably evil. I slept under this tree despite myself.

In 1863, Bret Harte wrote an account of nearby Mount Diablo – it was there a young priest encountered the devil himself. The devil showed the padre a vision of the future – the passing of Spanish California into American hands – but the devil promised to detain the Yankee hordes if the good father would renounce his calling. The offer was rejected and a fight ensued. Afterward the priest awoke, as from a dream.

It was here that I had my own dream of the devil. He showed me a vision of the future – the expanding hordes of cement families, the sprawling spiders of asphalt fingers climbing into the hills. Mansions on tiny lots, glass display cases for a late capitalist era, as special as Easter eggs, each one. Mass-produced originals. The fires never being lit. Cement doesn't burn. The seeds never return to the ground they came from. The kids have gone missing.

In what could be the worst possible horror, I was shown that many of these locations had already disappeared while we were talking. Similar tropes are found in poetry and art: the themes of ecology and the environment. Words cannot convey the sense of dread that accompanies the loss of these dreadful places. There is no great twist on this story. There is only disappointment and loss. This is the same loss that ghosts experience, the hellish frustration of not being able to return to the land of the living. These ghosts remind us that we too will die alone. They are kids forever hitchhiking and no one stops to pick them up anymore. These myths are rapidly being replaced by the mundane tragedies of suburban life and celebrity worship. Was I really just trying to protect an ecology of evil? The choice the devil gave me was this: Would you rather be frozen in ice forever or left to rot in the sun and be eaten by maggots?

The next morning I attempted to cleanse the area with my Transmagon crystals with little effect. I medi-

tated under the teddy bear tree, Imagining the area being flooded with white light. I imagined it clean and clear. No evil. No tree. No hill. No me.

I got up and decided to clean up the tree, removing all the bears and leaving only a few strands of tinsel. I stuffed the bears into a black plastic bag and left them on the side of the road.

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In 1999 I was contacted by a fellow named Robard Duncan who was also a follower of the Joaquin Murrieta legend. The flamboyant and mystical Mexican bandit Murrieta was notorious throughout the state of California during the gold rush days. One of Murrieta's magic powers was the ghostly ability to appear at different places simultaneously. Quantum physics proves that this is possible, though unlikely.

There is evidence that Murrieta spent time in the canyon, including one legend that when Murrieta stayed there his horse stood on a bed of hot coals, keeping his hooves warm for a quick getaway.

Duncan sent me news articles and photos of an excavation that took place near Sunol in 1984. Joaquin Murrieta was rumored to be buried under the foundation of an old adobe house, though no human remains were found. One yellowed clipping he sent me had a photo of a back hoe digging a hole in the ground in front of some trees in a clearing. Upon closer inspection with an antique magnifying glass, a dark form was recognizable in the background. It could be a tunnel, but it also looked like a human form. Could it possibly be both?

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There is a place on the other end of the canyon past Sunol, locally known as the Radical Rectangle. It now

serves as a drainage ditch, but at one time, it was a natural rock formation, visible from the road. The local Native American Alisal tribe revered this location for its unique, symmetric form, and it was a gathering place for young people to go swimming in the hot summers. There are also several secret tunnels under the Rectangle today, where rock carvings have been recorded, the meaning of which remain unknown. These same tunnels connect with a much later system built by Japanese immigrants in the late 1800s – a network which runs beneath most of the local canyon towns.

When I arrived at the rectangle it was getting dark again. I encountered a group of youths with colored hair drinking warm beers and riding skateboards in the drainage ditch. There was a bonfire in the middle of the ditch, fueled by a bale of dry hay. At the top of the ditch, they had set up a series of 4×8 plywood sheets on the dirt so they could get some speed going before trying to carve the death box.

“Who the fuck are you?” asked a short snotty boy.

“I’m looking for the tunnels,” I said. “Have you ever been inside them?”

“You mean the missile silos out by the nuclear lab?” he replied.

“No, the tunnels that lead from here to the water temple.”

“I heard about secret missile silos out by the old mental hospital,” another boy said, changing the subject.

“It’s not a mental hospital,” I corrected. “It used to be a TB hospital at one time, until it was abandoned in the 1950s. It’s true that there’s government land out there that’s not accessible by any road. And it’s also really close to the dilapidated nuclear laboratory, the one that’s the size of 3 airports.”

“No shit!” said the other boy.

“Who cares,” said the snotty boy.

“Dude, try riding with this,” and I gave him a

Transmagon form to hold while riding on his skateboard. He was pretty drunk but he knew what to do with it. Instinctually, he took off his pants as he rode in the ditch with the form, charging it up. It started to glow like a lantern and soon it was as if the area was framed from the inside of its form.

In the shadows of this light, we saw a figure move. We followed it with our eyes, as our movements were already committed.