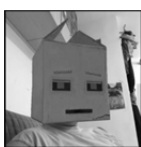




## Dark Trip

By Drew T. Noll

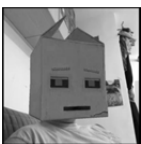
It was a dark night, in more ways than one. We agreed together that we would find a way to get around the tiny town. We agreed that we would find a way around the eclectic people lit up with eclectic lights, so they wouldn't vibrate and drive us all insane. We agreed to walk down the main street, a street called Main Street, to try and get home after a high school house party was closed down by twirling Kojaks, sirens and lights. The party had been loud and mostly unsophisticated, as most parties in my hometown had become. Drug abuse and underage drinking were regular byproducts of the society in which we had all been born. The only trains ridden in town were by hard-rockers and surf-punks, with glazed and



crazed eyeballs gleaming, reverberated off of their neighbors' sleepy windows and walls. It was the 1970's and the 60's had fermented into cheap deflowered Hawaiian shirts and imitation imported-cheese, floral-fondue breaking down. Together we walked down the street, enduring the warped faces of sweaty tourists staring at each of our footsteps placed one after the other on a poured-concrete sidewalk. We saw the shock and fear emanating, even some excitement hinging bets on the edges—maybe some excrement in the waiting—so we bolted to safety across the Pacific Coast Highway and onto the sand and solitude of our main beach in town, called Main Beach.

With each foot sinking further in, with each step in the sand drilling deeper and deeper into earth, we all breathed in a sigh of relief as the florescent-violence of tourists and its crude intimacy faded back to black. The sound-waves from the waves hitting the shore felt familiar, of it we were sure. Together we walked deeper, straight into the surf, but stopped when the roiling waves soaked in above our knees. Reversing our course, together, we shrunk back from the waves tumbling in and moved north again, along the seashore's edge, a strip of sand and sludge that defined death for both land and for sea-life unseen.

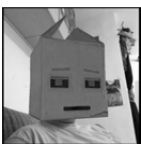
The storm that had just blown through had washed kelp into piles up onto the beach. The seaweed stank. I tripped on it every other step, with its sea-bulbs catching between my toes, salt and sand scrapping against skin, clinging coarsely. We walked to the dark formless rock face at the north end of Main Beach, to the cliffs that hung above Rock Pile, a pile of rocks



once spewn from a volcano. We climbed. It was a path that we all knew, but none better than me. I had spent many days traversing the cliffs there and knew the pitfalls and promontories by heart. It was home, finally; I was away from all the people that looked and gawked with warbling faces—I *was free of that now...*

I was home... which is why I couldn't understand when the ground beneath me began to move. I took a step and slid back down the path two ... or three. The sticky, wet earth was moving with me as I tried to lead the others up the cliff face, up a path I knew so well. I couldn't go back to the lights and crowds. I had to continue, I had to climb. I reengaged my drive, turning back around, and my perceptions then warped along with the path sliding down. I realized, only then, that the others had left. I remembered them saying that they wanted to go around, walk on the sidewalk, in the town, under the lights, with tourists staring down. My friends didn't care about the people and cars, the Kojaks flashing and all of those sinking sounds emanating out from under the stars.

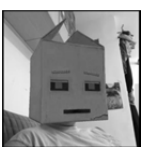
They left me alone... I was alone ... and the ground was moving beneath me. I was tripping on more than my own perceptions—I was tripping, now muddy from top to bottom; I was bloated out with agave and mushrooms blooming up only to be shorn down. I was swimming through earth as it slid down with gravity falling; a galaxy of dirt spiraling out with centrifugal force. Caught inside the horizon of my waking, all I could do was to cling to the planet slinging itself around the clock and through space, one pace at a time.



It became that familiar struggle between me and me, between the waters above and the waters below, climbing that sliding torrent of hungry earth as it disintegrated into the sea one granule at a time. It reached out and stuck to me, the earth, thankfully, binding my feet into blocks of land, anchors keeping me on the ground as I slid down. I lost my flip-flop sandals, each being sucked into the mud like lips smacking over a greedy tongue. I kept battling to get to the top of the cliff face, the whole time wondering what was wrong with the cosmos. How was it possible that my well-worn footholds no longer were there...?

The earth was moving, it was flowing, and it had covered over my steps as it all slumped ever downwards to the rocks and sand below ... and it was doing so to keep me from reaching the top, even sucking down my flip-flops. How was it possible that I was alone and fighting to see over the edge? How had this happened? I stood there and wondered aloud to myself, stuck in another path. I wondered who I was, and then I began to scream into the heavens, shaking muddied fists, dripping down at every clench. I screamed at the universe with pounding questions reverberating off the blank surface shining from inside my skull. I called out to all and no one in particular: WHO the ... AM I!? What the ... is this?!

But, with regression and comedown, I eventually gave in to the sliding cliff face, backtracking down and around, just as my friends had when they abandoned me to my ego. I walked barefoot on the sidewalk, just like they had, together before, under the lights with the tourists vibrating all around.



Then, I ended the night asleep in my bed, cozied into the walkout basement of the home I grew up in.

On the morning after I awoke; around me was all the usual fog, which also descended upon the workings of my head and the mud in my bed. I had forgotten completely about my question to the universe, the cosmos from the night before. *It was lame anyways, broken and half-built.* I didn't, however, forget about the path of mud that had been released to block me on my way up the hill. I walked out of the basement and rode my skateboard down to Rock Pile to see if my suspicions were true: that, *somehow, it had all only been a dream;* I just knew.

Arriving at a spot with a view, I found a scar ripped out from a slide of mud unleashed from the cliff above. It had rolled down towards the beach below. It had occurred, evidently caused by the storm someday before. The entire area was cordoned off with hazard tape that had been placed at the moment of my arrival. I stood with others gawking from within the safe-zone behind the tape winnowing the morning breeze. I couldn't get close enough to even see how far I had made it up the cliff face, or to find where my feet had imprinted into the mud, leaving my signature stamping ego into a new path up the hill. I couldn't even look for my flip-flop sandals that had swam down into the earth the night before—*maybe this was all just a dream*—I thought to myself, as I rolled away on my skateboard. In the end, or so I concluded, it must all have just been another dark trip to brighten the edges.

