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Anaya, Rudolfo - Essays by Anaya

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Fiesta de Maíz por Juan Orosco, 1979
foto cortesía de MRM & RCAF

RCAF Invades Taos; Symposium Planned for March

*Millicent Rogers hosts
Chicano exhibits*

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*LOS THREE:
Rodriguez; Colorado
artists with New Mexico
connections*

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"...(before) long the most valuable of all arts will be the art of deriving a comfortable subsistence from the smallest area of soil. No community whose every member possesses this art can ever be the victim of oppression in any of it forms."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1859

"Santa Fe Style" exploits "la nacioncita;" María Valdez of San Luis takes a critical look at this unique bioregion.
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Devil Deer, Rudolfo Anaya's latest creation is published for the first time anywhere in *Arellano*.
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Eras, tablas, modos de sembrar de antes: salvan agua, tiempo y producen más.
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"el tesoro de la 'cequia," by Moises Rael of Questa, offers a humorous glimpse to the annual Spring ritual known as "la saca."
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Devil Deer

Rudolfo Anaya

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At night, frost settled like glass dust on the peaks of the Jemez Mountains, but when the sun came up the cold dissolved. The falling leaves of the aspen were showers of gold coins. Deer sniffed the air and moved silently along the edges of the meadows in the high country. Clean and sharp and well defined, autumn had come to the mountain.

In the pueblo the red *riztras* hung against brown adobe walls, and large ears of corn filled kitchen corners. The harvest of the valley had been brought in, and the people rested. A haze of piñon smoke clung like a veil over the valley.

Late at night the men polished their rifles and told hunting stories. Neighbors on the way to work met in front of the post office or in the pueblo center to stop and talk. It was deer season, a ritual shared since immemorial time. Friends made plans to go together, to stay maybe three or four days, to plan supplies. The women kidded the men: "You better bring me a good one this time, a big buck who maybe got a lot of does pregnant in his life. Bring a good one."

Cruz heard the sound of laughter as neighbors talked. In the night he made love to his wife with renewed energy, just as the big buck he was dreaming about. "That was good," his young wife whispered in the dark, under the covers, as she too dreamed of the buck her husband would bring. Deer meat to make jerky, to cook with red chile all winter.

These were the dreams and planning that made the pueblo happy when deer season came. The men were excited. The old men talked of hunts long ago, told stories of the deer they had seen in the high country, sometimes meeting deer with special powers, or remembering an accident that happened long ago. Maybe a friend or brother had been shot. There were many stories to tell, and the old men talked far into the night.

The young men grew eager. They didn't want stories, they wanted the first day of deer season to come quickly so they could get up there and bag a buck. Maybe they had already scouted an area, and they knew some good meadows where a herd of does came down to browse in the evening. Or maybe they had hunted there the year before, and they had seen deer signs.

Everyone knew the deer population was growing scarce. It was harder and harder to get a buck. Too many hunters, maybe. Over the years there were fewer bucks. You had to go deeper into the forest, higher, maybe find new places, maybe have strong medicine.

Cruz thought of this as he planned. This time he and his friend Joe were going up to a place they called Black Ridge. They called it Black Ridge because there the pine trees were thick and dark. Part of the ridge was fenced in by the Los Alamos Laboratory, and few hunters wandered near the chain-link fence.

The place was difficult to get to, hard to hunt, and there were rumors that the fence carried electricity. Or there were electric sensors and if they went off maybe a helicopter would swoop

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down and the Lab guards would arrest you. Nobody hunted near the fence; the ridge lay silent and ominous on the side of the mountain.

All month Cruz and Joe planned, but a few days before the season started Joe was unloading lumber at work and the pile slipped and crashed down to break his leg.

"Don't go alone," Joe told Cruz. "You don't want to be up there alone. Go with your cousin, they're going up to the brown bear area..."

"There's no deer there," Cruz complained. "Too many hunters." He wanted to go high, up to Black Ridge where few hunters went. Something was telling him that he was going to get a big buck this year.

So on the night before the season opened he drove his truck up to Black Ridge. He found an old road that had been cut when the Los Alamos fence had been put in, and he followed it as high as it went. That night he slept in his truck, not bothering to make a fire or set up camp. He was going to get a buck early, he was sure, maybe be back at the pueblo by afternoon.

Cruz awoke from a dream and clutched the leather bag tied at his belt. The fetish of stone, a black bear, was in the bag. He had talked to the bear before he fell asleep, and the bear had come in his dreams, standing upright like a man, walking towards Cruz, words in its mouth as if it was about to speak.

Cruz stood frozen. The bear was deformed. One paw was twisted like an old tree root, the other was missing. The legs were

gnarled, and the huge animal walked like an old man with arthritis. The face was deformed, the mouth dripping with saliva. Only the eyes were clear as it looked at Cruz. Go away, it said, go away from this place. Not even the medicine of your grandfathers can help you here.

What did the dream mean, Cruz wondered and rolled down the truck window. The thick forest around him was dark. A sound came and receded from the trees, like the moaning of wind, like a restless spirit breathing, there just beyond the Tech Area fence of the laboratories. There was a blue glow in the dark forest, but it was too early for it to be the glow of dawn.

Cruz listened intently. Someone or something was dying in the forest, and breathing in agony. The breath of life was going out of the mountain; the mountain was dying. The eerie, blue glow filled the night. In the old stories, when time was new, the earth had opened and bled its red, hot blood. But that was the coming to life of the mountain; now the glow was the emanation of death. The earth was dying, and

the black bear had come to warn him.

Cruz slumped against the steering wheel. His body ached; he stretched. It wasn't good to hunt alone, he thought, then instantly tried to erase the thought. He stepped out to urinate, then he turned to pray as the dawn came over the east rim of the ridge. He held the medicine bag which contained his bear. Give me strength, he thought, to take a deer to my family. Let me not be afraid.

It was the first time that he had even thought of being afraid on the mountain, and he found the thought disturbing.

He ate the beef sandwich his wife had packed for him, and drank coffee from the thermos. Then he checked his rifle and began to walk, following the old ruts of the road along the fence, looking for deer sign, looking for movement in thick forest. When the sun came over the volcanic peaks of the Jemez, the frost disappeared. There were no clouds to the west, no sign of storm.

Cruz had walked a short distance; a shadow in the pine trees made him stop and freeze. Something was moving off to his right. He listened intently and heard the wheezing sound he had heard earlier. The sound was a slow inhaling and exhaling of breath. It's a buck, Joe thought, and drew up his rifle.

As he stood looking for the outline of the buck in the trees he felt a vibration of the earth, as if the entire ridge was moving. The sound and the movement frightened him. He knew the mountain, he had hunted its peaks since he was

a boy, and he had never felt anything like this. He saw movement again, and turned to see the huge rack of the deer, dark antlers moving through the trees.

The buck was inside the fence, about fifty yards away. Cruz would have to go in for the deer. The dark pines were too thick to get a clear shot. Cruz walked quietly along the fence. At any moment he expected the buck to startle and run; instead the buck seemed to follow him.

When Cruz stopped, the buck stopped, and it blended into the trees so Cruz wasn't sure if it was a deer or if he only was imagining it. He knew excitement sometimes made the hunter see things. Tree branches became antlers, and hunters sometimes fired at movement in the brush. That's how accidents happened.

Cruz moved again and the shadow of the buck moved with him, still partially hidden by the thick trees. Cruz stopped and lifted his rifle, but the form of the deer was gone. The deer was stalking him, Cruz thought. Well, this happened. A hunter would be following a deer and the buck would circle around and follow the hunter. There were lots of stories. A buck would appear between two hunting parties and the hunters would fire at each other while the buck slipped away.

Cruz sat on a log and looked into the forest. There it was, the outline of the buck in the shadows. Cruz opened his leather bag and took out the small, stone bear. What he saw made him shudder. There was a crack along the length of the bear. A crack in his medicine. He looked up and the blank eyes of the buck in the trees were staring at him.

Cruz fired from the hip, cursing the buck as he did. The report of the rifle echoed down the ridge.

Nearby a black crow cried in surprise and rose into the air. The wind moaned in the treetops. The chill in the air made Cruz shiver. Why did I do that, he thought. He looked for the buck; it was still there. It had not moved.

Cruz rose and walked until he came to a place where someone had ripped a large hole in the fence. He stepped through the opening, knowing he shouldn't enter the area, but he wasn't going to lose the buck. The big bucks had been thinned out of the mountain. There weren't many left. This one had probably escaped by living inside the fenced area.

I'm going to get me a pampered Los Alamos buck, Cruz thought. *Sonofabitch* is not going to get away from me. The buck moved and Cruz followed. He knew that he had come a long way from the truck. If he got the buck he would have to quarter it, and it would take two days to get it back. I'll find a way, he thought, not wanting to give up the buck which led him forward. I can drive the truck up close to the fence.

But why didn't the buck spook when he

fired at it? And why did he continue to hear the sound in the forest? And the vibration beneath his feet? What kind of devil machines were they running over in the labs that made the earth tremble? Accelerators. Plutonium. Atom smashers. What do I know, Cruz thought. I only know I want my brother to return to the pueblo with me. Feed my family. Venison steaks with fried potatoes and onions.

As he followed the buck, Cruz began to feel better. They had gone up to the top of the ridge and started back down. The buck was heading back toward the truck. Good, Cruz thought.

Now the buck stopped, and Cruz could clearly see the thick antlers for the first time. They were thick with velvet and lichen clinging to them. A pine branch clung to the antlers, Cruz thought, or patches of old velvet. But when he looked close he saw it was patches of hair that grew on the antlers.

"God almighty," Cruz mumbled. He had never seen anything like that. He said a prayer and fired. The buck gave a grunt, Cruz fired again. The buck fell to its knees.

"Fall you *sonofabitch!*" Cruz cursed and fired again. He knew he had placed three bullets right in the heart.

The buck toppled on its side and Cruz rushed forward to cut its throat and drain its blood. When he knelt down to lift the animal's head he stopped. The deer was deformed. The hide was torn and bleeding in places, and a green

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bile seeped from the holes the bullets had made. The hair on the antlers looked like mangy, human hair, and the eyes were two white stones mottled with blood. The buck was blind.

Cruz felt his stomach heave. He turned and vomited, the sandwich and coffee of the morning meal splashed at his feet. He turned and looked at the buck again. Its legs were bent and gnarled. That's why it didn't bound away. The tail was long, like a donkey tail.

Cruz stood and looked at the deer, and he looked into the dark pine forest. On the other side of the ridge lay Los Alamos, the laboratories, and nobody knew what in the hell went on there. But whatever it was, it was seeping into the earth, seeping into the animals of the forest. To live within the fence was deadly, and now there were holes in the fence.

Cruz felt no celebration in taking the life of the buck. He could not raise the buck's head and offer the breath of life to his people. He couldn't offer the corn meal. He was afraid to touch the buck, but something told him he couldn't leave the deer on the mountainside. He had to get

it back to the pueblo; he had to let the old men see it.

He gathered his resolve and began dragging the buck down the ridge toward the truck. Patches of skin caught in the branches of fallen trees and ripped away. Cruz sweated and cursed. Why did this deer come to haunt me? he thought. The bear in the dream had warned him, and he had not paid attention to the vision. It was not a good sign, but he had to get the deformed deer to the old men.

It was dark when he drove into the pueblo. When he came over the hill and saw the lighted windows, his spirits raised. This was home, a safe circle. But in his soul Cruz didn't feel well. Going into the fenced area for the deer had sapped his strength.

He turned down the dirt road to his home. Dogs came out to bark, people peered from windows. They knew his truck had come in. He parked in front of his home, but he sat in the truck. His wife came out, and sensing his mood, she said nothing. Joe appeared in the dark, a flashlight in his hand.

"What happened?" Joe asked. Cruz motioned to the back of the truck. Joe flashed the light on the buck. It was an ugly sight which made him recoil. "Oh God," he whispered. He whistled, and other shadows appeared in the dark, neighbors who had seen Cruz's truck drive in. The men looked at the buck and shook their heads.

"I got him inside the fence," Cruz said.

"Take Cruz in the house," one of the men told Joe. They would get rid of the animal.

"Come inside," Joe said. His friend had been up on the mountain all day, and he had killed this devil deer. Cruz's voice and vacant stare told the rest.

Cruz followed Joe and his wife into the house. He sat at the kitchen table and his wife poured him a cup of coffee. Cruz drank, thankful that the rich taste washed away the bitterness he felt in his mouth.

Joe said nothing. Outside the men were taking the deformed buck away. Probably burn it, he thought. How in the hell did something like that happen. We've never seen a deer like this, the old men would say later. A new story would grow up around Cruz, the man who killed the devil deer. Even this grandchildren would hear the story in the future.

And Cruz? What was to become of Cruz? He had gone into the forbidden land, into the mountain area surrounded by the laboratory fence. There where the forest glowed at night and the earth vibrated to the hum of atom smashers, lasers, and radioactivity.

The medicine men would perform a cleansing ceremony; they would pray for Cruz. But did they have enough good medicine to wash away the evil the young man had touched?