



# SHOOTING FOR THE MOON

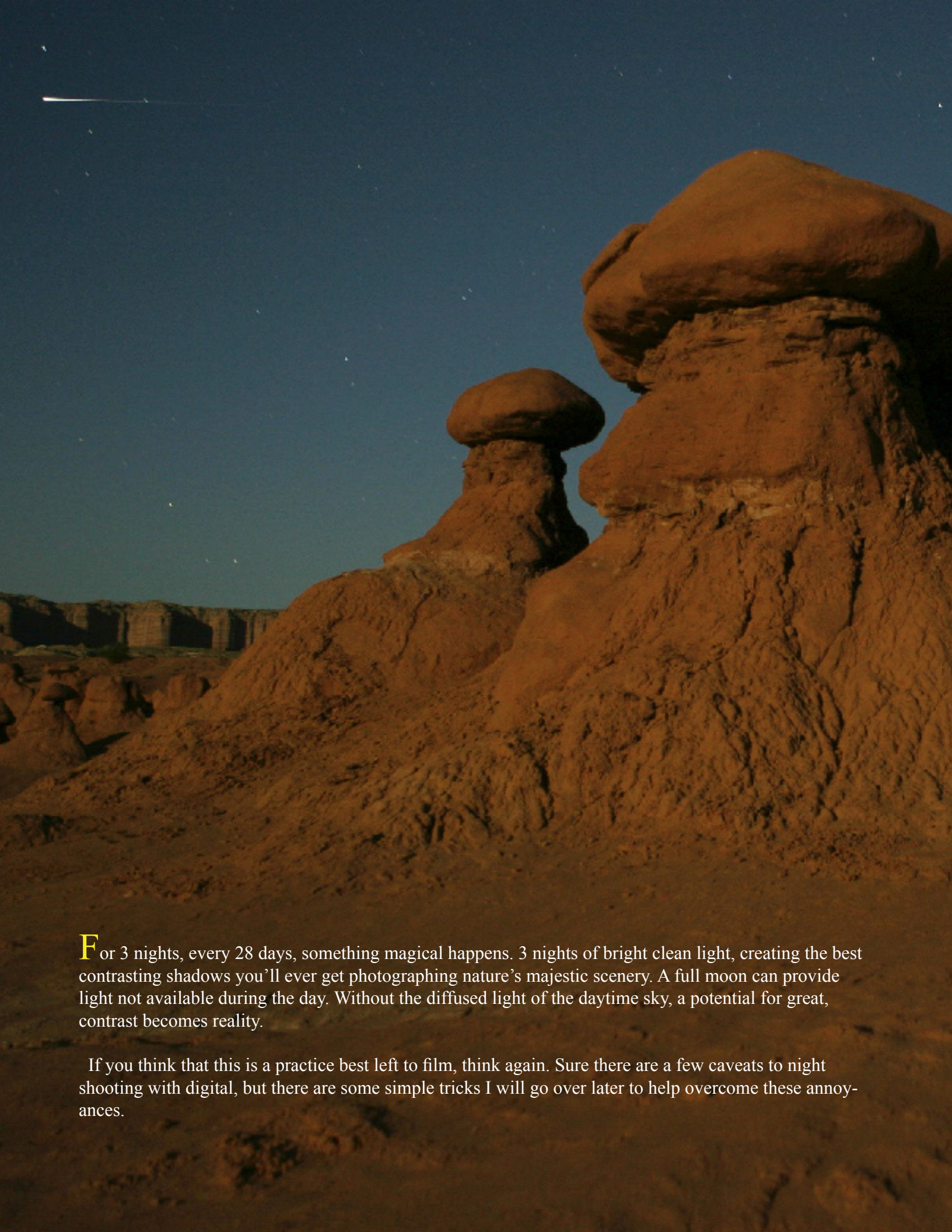
*Moonlight has properties  
unmatched by the sun*

Some of the best times I've  
spent taking pictures have  
been well after the sun had  
gone down

*By Rick Bassett*

Arches National Park, UT  
Canon Digital Rebel, Canon 28-80mm@28mm f/3.5 120 sec.  
ISO 100





**F**or 3 nights, every 28 days, something magical happens. 3 nights of bright clean light, creating the best contrasting shadows you'll ever get photographing nature's majestic scenery. A full moon can provide light not available during the day. Without the diffused light of the daytime sky, a potential for great, contrast becomes reality.

If you think that this is a practice best left to film, think again. Sure there are a few caveats to night shooting with digital, but there are some simple tricks I will go over later to help overcome these annoyances.





Goblin Valley State Park, UT

Canon Digital Rebel, Canon 24-70mm@24mm f/2.8 25 sec.ISO  
200





I live in one of the most beautiful areas in the world. Utah. This state has a vast diversity of landscapes from which to take photographic advantage. The lush, green forests of the Uintahs, in the Rocky Mountain zone. Here you can find a variety of subjects from angry granite mountains, still mirror-like lakes, to quiet grassy meadows with beautiful mountain backdrops. The dry, colorful pallet of the Colorado Plateau zone, where you can feel like you are on another planet. In this zone you will find everything from pink sand dunes to great red rock arches. The lack of rainfall gives photographers, flora and fauna of a different nature. The most underrated of the bunch, the Basin and Range zone. In this zone are some of

the most interesting man-made structures, long abandoned by humans. Ghost towns and dry lakebeds dot this zone. Among these three physiographic provinces, a plethora of moonlit opportunities exist.

My main focus has been in the Colorado Plateau region of Utah. In this article I have examples from Arches National park, Goblin Valley State Park, and The San Rafael river valley.

San Rafael River Valley and Goblin Valley are found in the San Rafael Swell. This is a wide plateau crossed by two deep river systems and surrounded by a ring of swollen strata. The rivers, the San Rafael River, and the Green River have cut their way through this uplift leaving behind buttes, mesas, and other rock formations labeled by the Native Americans from this region as "Hoodoos".

ABOVE LEFT: Sheep Rock.  
Arches National Park, UT  
Canon Digital Rebel, Canon  
70-200mm IS USM @70mm  
f2.8 88 sec. ISO 100  
RIGHT: Delicate Arch  
Arches National Park  
Canon Digital Rebel  
Canon 20-80mm @28mm  
f18 approx 14 min. ISO 100





Goblin Valley State Park, UT

Canon Digital Rebel, Canon 24-70mm@24mm f/2.8 25 sec.  
ISO 200



San Rafael Valley, UT

Canon Digital Rebel, Canon 24-70mm@24mm

f/2.8 30 sec. ISO 200







Arches National Park is truly one of Utah's great gifts. Spend at least 1 full day. Take some time during the day to find your moonlit locations. I have found that a GPS is great for marking future locations. Many of the really good locations will require you to hike in. All the trails are well marked, and can be traversed under the full moon. (Most times without any flashlight)

During the summer months, night photography, at these locations, is a great relief from the daytime temperatures that can reach triple digits. Your equipment list should include water, water, and more water. As well as a camera that has a bulb feature for getting the shutter open for the 30 plus seconds required for nighttime shooting. A sturdy tripod, and if shooting with film, don't be tempted to use a fast ISO. Stick to the 200, or even 100 ISO rolls. (You will be much happier with the final output). Bring a wide angle lens, and your cleaning kit to remove any dust that sometimes blows around out here. A light jacket may be required, but not likely.

Early moonrise is great for getting those long shadows and dark crevasses. It's also good for getting the light that still glows where the sun has just

gone down. With the early moonrise to your back, your scene will usually contain the last glow of the sun well below the horizon. This gradient effect is shown in the Goblin Valley photo on page XX.

The experience is truly humbling. My first solo night trip was to Arches. I can't describe the feeling of hiking up the trail to Delicate Arch under nothing but the moonlight. I did take my trusty Mag Lite, but tried to use it as little as possible so that my eyes would remain accustomed to the low light levels. Only a few places on the trail came into full moon shadow and required the use of the light. My mind wandered around the shadows and quietness into a surreal dreamlike state. The most rewarding experience of all of my moonlight ventures.

Digital night photography has 1 issue, but can be easily squashed with a little post process work. "Sensor Hot Spots" have a tendency to add unwanted artifacts to long exposures. I have yet to see a digital camera that didn't have at least a few. Take a 60 sec. exposure at ISO 100 with your lens cap on and you'll see what I mean. Using Photoshop to squelch these little devils is really quite simple. If you shoot RAW, and are using CS3 or newer

these steps are handled by Photoshop Raw automatically.

1. Take a 60 second exposure with the lens cap on.
2. Open the resulting image in Photoshop.
3. Using the levels tool, adjust the image until the “Hot Spots” are bright, and everything else is black.  
Save the image, but leave it open.



4. Open a long exposure photo with “Hot Spot” artifacts.



5. Load the selection from the “Load Selection” dialog. (Selecting the saved “HotSpot” image) Note the marching ants around your “Hot Spots”
6. I like to expand the selection by 3-5 pixels. (Goto “Select” “Modify” “Expand”)



7. Then simply use the “Dust and Scratches Tool” to remove the artifacts.
8. By leaving the dust cap exposure open, you can fix as many exposures as you need.