

ion - not a fantasy

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the extensive and regular training of a potential initiate. Known as a neophyte, the would-be initiate has to enter a long period of intensive preparatory training, prior to actually entering a practicing coven. This training is supplied by a member of the coven who possesses a status of a reasonably advanced level within the coven. Upon completion, which incidentally is not always the case, the neophyte goes through an actual initiation ceremony.

Once within the coven, the adept can then through further study achieve a higher degree of arcane knowledge. The ranks range from the neophyte, as the lowest, up the magistallius as the highest. The diffusion of power within the coven is of an extensive nature. The powers with which these people deal are of a strong and potentially dangerous kind, the adept that



Ritual Implements

Photo by Jack Trifis

attempts invocations beyond his capabilities is courting danger.

The actual rites involved include a variety of subjects from the purification of the instruments on up to invocations which can only be accomplished by master adepts, shape-changing and the higher black arts. It must be emphasized here that "black" is being used in context with those rituals above and beyond the reign of nature, and not in the Judeo-Christian sense of good or evil.

Upon completion of the initiation ceremony, and during subsequent parts of his advancement, the initiate is given various portions of a manuscript entitled "The Book of Shadows". It is a document dealing with some background history, but, in large, concerns the various rituals which can be utilized. On attainment of the higher degrees, the entire manuscript will be in the possession of the practitioner. An important aspect of this, is that the entire book has to be copied out by hand.

The coven

The coven itself consists of a number of people, maximum 13, whose ultimate goal is total self-purification. The involvement with this religion requires the total immersion of the initiate. An intense concentration is required for any ritual, usually with a lengthy and rigorous.

preparatory stage. Without the total amalgamation of their individual selves into what they are doing, potential dangers can occur. The adept must be egotistical in the sense that he must possess a supreme self-confidence within himself, his abilities, and the rituals.

Meetings, or Grand Sabbaths are held on the traditional holidays, All Hallows Eve, Candlemeus (Feb. 2), Beltain (end of April) Lammastide (Aug. 1) also on the winter and summer solistices and equinoxes. These are all occasions when the forces with which the witch deals with are at a relevant stage in their development.

The individual coven met otherwise in what is called an esphat. The time of the full moon is a popular one, though meetings can be called by the high priest or priestess at any time. Traditionally an attempt is made to have certain clauses filled concerning the actual place of the meeting. It's preferable at a place where three roads meet, having water nearby and attempting to get as close as possible to elemental nature (i.e. woods).

The sects

In the event of an actual sabbatical there are two ways in which these are effected. Witchcraft contains, at this point in time, two noteworthy groups, The Alexandrians and the Gardinians.

Traditionally the Alexandrians follow as closely as possible the dictates of The Old Religion. The beliefs which have withstood for centuries the ravages of time and man, are used in undiluted form by these people. Rituals are consummated in the exact same manner and using the exact instruments used centuries ago. The forces they tap are forces which possess neither good nor evil limitations. They exist in a stratum unrecognized by most men, a stratum which does not recognize the petty attempts



The Sabbatic Goat

of man to enforce his sense of moral ethics on objects divorced from himself.

The initiates of this religion practice in full traditional clothing. These consist of several articles. Each person dons a black cassok with bell sleeves and a cowl which can be pulled forward to cover the face. Around the waist is tied a cigellium (a cord) upon which are the symbolic knots. A neophyte wears a tan cord, an adept a red one, the high priestess dons a white or silver cord, and the magistar a gold. In addition to

this most adepts or higher levels of learning also wear a tabbard, a long rectangular piece of material which rests on the shoulders and denotes special functions or knowledge. Capes are worn by both the high priestess and the magistar, white for the former, black with red lining for the latter.

This rather cumbersome and traditional way of dressing is in direct contrast to the practice of the Gardinians, whose meetings are conducted in the nude. This is done due to the belief that clothing fetters the forces which they wish to invoke.

The Gardinians are a sect whose views and practices deviate from the true historical method. They tend to be milder in their practices, both in the actual ritual and the instruments used.



An overview

Whatever the manner in which they practice, witches hold one thing in common. That is the basic desire to strive towards self-purification. With the achievement of this, the witch has attained his goal, he becomes one with the gods. His earthly trials and tribulations will be over, and he will dwell as part of the gods he has served so well.

Is that not what Christians do likewise?

Within the Church, intricate rituals are followed, the words of strange garbed men is taken as law, outside, Christian ideals are pursued, all in the name of heaven. The goal striven to obtain exists in some shangri-la where everlasting peace and joy can be found. Yet man in his ignorance continues to persecute those of another faith, who through methods as sincere and believable as Christian ones, attempt to reach the same conclusion.

