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# Secrets of the Occult

Guidebook

Richard B. Spence



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# Table of Contents

About Richard B. Spence	i
<b>1.</b> What Is the Occult?	1
<b>2.</b> Fauns, Fairies, and Djinn	6
<b>3.</b> The Christmas Tree and Other Rituals	19
<b>4.</b> Practical Magic: Love, Money, and Health	28
<b>5.</b> Alchemy, Astrology, and Divination	34
<b>6.</b> Talking with the Dead	43
<b>7.</b> The Occult Ancient World	51
<b>8.</b> Vampires, Werewolves, and Zombies	61
<b>9.</b> Religious Faith and the Occult	70
<b>10.</b> Mysterious Places	78
<b>11.</b> Crime and the Occult	85
<b>12.</b> UFOs and the Occult	94
<b>13.</b> The Occult Russian Revolution	101
<b>14.</b> Hitler, Nazism, and the Occult	109
<b>15.</b> The Occult Soviet Union	117
<b>16.</b> Satanism and the Occult	124
<b>17.</b> The Occult Renaissance and Reformation	131
<b>18.</b> Witchcraft and the Occult	137
<b>19.</b> The Occult Enlightenment	143
<b>20.</b> American Occultism	149
<b>21.</b> The Occult's 19th-Century Revival	155
<b>22.</b> Aleister Crowley's Occult Life	163
<b>23.</b> Popular Occulture	171
<b>24.</b> The Techno-Occult	178



# What Is the Occult?

In popular imagination, the occult is connected to all things supernatural, magical, or mystical. The term *occult* itself simply means “concealed” or “hidden”—specifically, hidden from sight. The big question is: What’s hidden? The answer is vast: The occult involves not just beliefs or practices but an entire world that surrounds us and influences us, but of which we are (mostly) only dimly aware. Occult beliefs and practices seek to make this world accessible and even controllable.

## The Approach of This Series

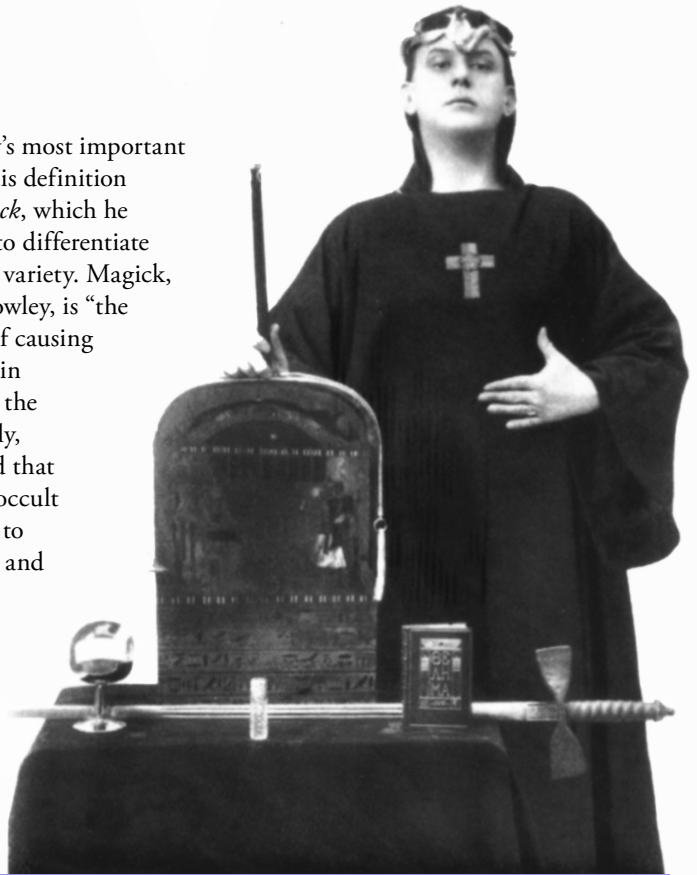
This series forms a portrait of the occult out of people, places, and things. It also surveys the influence of the occult in certain periods, including the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment, and modern times. It digs into the influence of the occult on culture—high and low—and its influence on politics, science, and technology. Here are a few specific topics the series looks at:

- ▼ golems—that is, human effigies made of clay and animated by magical means
- ▼ necromancy, which involves the summoning of and communication with the dead
- ▼ monsters, including an alleged werewolf
- ▼ occult places
- ▼ the secret language and occult power of symbols
- ▼ witchcraft
- ▼ contemporary popular culture
- ▼ a connection between occultism and UFOs
- ▼ charlatanism in occult matters

## Introducing Aleister Crowley

Above all, the occult is a state of mind, which is to say, a state of reality. No one better epitomizes this than the English magician, libertine, and occasional intelligence asset Aleister Crowley. He has rightly been called the most influential—and infamous—occultist of the 20th century.

Perhaps Crowley's most important contribution is his definition of the term *magick*, which he spelled with a *k* to differentiate it from the stage variety. Magick, according to Crowley, is “the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with the will.” Importantly, Crowley believed that magick and the occult offered a chance to reconcile science and religion.



## ALEISTER CROWLEY

### The Government and the Occult

Even the government, or at least the CIA, has become mixed up with the occult. In the 1950s, a radio executive named Robert Monroe began experimenting with sound waves and the effects they seemed to have on the human mind. He found that certain sound patterns could induce states of sleep, hyperawareness, or even euphoria, all without the subject's conscious awareness—that is, they produced these effects occultly.

In the early 1960s, Monroe formed a research institute to conduct research more systematically. During this same period, the CIA initiated a secret research program dubbed MK-ULTRA, which was broadly dedicated to the investigation of mind control. It was almost inevitable that they would take an interest in Monroe's experiments.

The CIA's interest was further stimulated by reports that the Soviets were heavily invested in investigating extrasensory perception, psychokinesis, and other occult-relevant matters for espionage and military application. Some feared a so-called magic gap might result.

In the late 1970s, the CIA and the US military further invested in a secret program. This program carefully selected subjects who were supposedly taught how to separate their consciousness from their physical bodies and travel to far-off locations and even backward and forward in time. This was summarized in a 1983 classified report on the so-called Gateway Experience.

### **The Occult's Guidelines**

Occultism does have rules, or at least some guidelines. Two essential principles are that everything is connected and everything is alive. The first principle is best expressed in the mystical mantra, "As above, so below." The smallest thing reflects the greatest and vice versa. The occult treats consciousness, or will, as an energy that transcends all barriers and permeates everything. The universe, even if immaterial, is ultimately a single, vast, conscious entity.

It follows that in the so-called occultiverse, there is no such thing as accident or coincidence. Every action, no matter how seemingly insignificant, has meaning and purpose.

Other general rules are the law of attraction—that like attracts like—and the law of similarity. An example of the law of attraction is negative thinking attracting negative things. The law of similarity argues that any resemblance between two things—no matter how different otherwise—is indicative of some deeper, occult connection.



Also relevant is a law of opposites: For every yin, there must be a yang. The deeper meaning is that apparent opposites are really different aspects of the same thing.

Finally, the occult is morally ambivalent. Nothing is inherently good or evil. Those qualities are found only in the intent—the will—behind them.

## Reading

Crowley, Aleister. *Magick in Theory and Practice*. Lecom, 1929.

Wilson, Colin. *The Occult: A History*. Random House, 1971.

## Questions

- 1 What does the word *occult* mean?
- 2 Is the definition of *occult* what you expected?

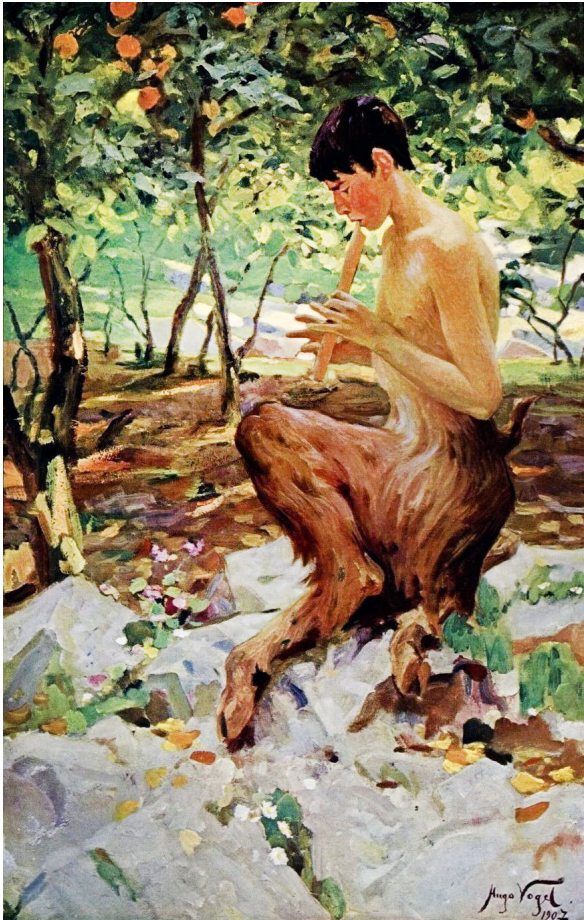


# Fauns, Fairies, and Djinn

Occultism posits that we inhabit a limited spectrum of reality within a much larger one. That larger world is hidden, or occulted, from us. Occult belief also holds that this invisible realm is inhabited by a vast array of intelligent beings who can be helpful, indifferent, or outright malevolent. This chapter looks at some of those beings.

## Crombie, Kurmos, and Pan

One early spring day in 1966, Robert Ogilvie Crombie went for a stroll in Edinburgh's Royal Botanical Gardens. Much to his astonishment, he encountered a faun. According to Crombie, the creature was straight out of Greek mythology: three feet tall, with pointed ears and chin, and two little horns sprouting from its forehead. It also had goat legs with cloven hooves.



Per Crombie, the faun could talk and had a name: Kurmos. Kurmos described himself as a tree shepherd, and he was only one of many. This encounter with Kurmos was only the beginning, as Crombie described later in his book *The Gentleman and the Faun*. More meetings and conversations followed, with Crombie ultimately meeting—and conversing further—with Kurmos's boss, the great god Pan himself.

**FAUN**



**PAN**

It's easy to dismiss Crombie's story as a delusion. Crombie acknowledged that "many people will find it impossible to believe" him. However, not everyone is dismissive of Crombie's tale, especially not those who claim to have lived through a similar experience.

At the time, Crombie was a 67-year-old scientist who'd been sidelined by ill health and had decided to move to the countryside to renew his acquaintance with nature. Apparently, that worked in a far more personal way than he'd expected. Crombie went on to become one of the founding members of the vanguard ecological movement known as the Findhorn Foundation, in the far north of Scotland.

The beings Crombie claimed to have met have appeared under various names and various guises in almost every culture's tales since time immemorial. For lack of a better term, this series will refer to them as the Others. These beings possess guile, free will, and murky agendas of their own. They're also believed to be far more aware of us than we are of them, and they can change forms and manipulate our thoughts. In other words, they possess magic.

Among the ancient Greek deities, Pan is generally regarded as an autochthonous god: one that springs from the local earth. Various legends turn him into a son of Hermes or Zeus. But Pan doesn't really fit with the so-called Olympian gods. Like the goddess Hecate, who was closely identified with sorcery and witchcraft, Pan's origins are obscure. He had no temples; his places of worship were caves and groves. And there wasn't just one Pan. Beneath the top Pan were many smaller Pans like Kurmos. The Romans renamed Pan as Faunus. By any name, he was the god of wild nature, and, like nature, he could be benevolent or terrifying.

That ties in with a central point of occult philosophy, which is that good and evil don't exist in the usual sense. Nature isn't one or the other. It is just nature. For instance, consider fire: It warms us and cooks our food, but also burns and destroys. A fire that destroys a home and kills the people inside isn't evil. Evil resides in the mind of the arsonist who started it.

## Fairies

Almost 300 years before Robert Crombie, another Scotsman, the devout Christian minister Robert Kirk, left another account of the hidden world. Kirk was the author of the book *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, published in the late 17th century. According to the reverend, beings variously called fairies, siths, or good people occupied a “middle nature” between humans and angels. In our realm, they appeared and disappeared at will. They were shape-shifters able to assume any human or animal form.

But their true form, according to Kirk, was like a “condensed cloud” best seen at twilight. Having no solid form, they were immune to human weapons. But they were extremely averse to anything made of iron, which they would not use or touch.

In many respects, the fairy folk seemed almost human. They had a highly organized society with classes, tribes, kingdoms, and rulers. They frequently quarreled among themselves. While they lived much longer than us, they weren’t immortal. Still, the fairies’ relationship with our kind was fraught with ambiguity and deception.

An angry or malicious fairy was sometimes called a boggart. Its behavior resembled what we’d call a poltergeist today. Instead of cleaning the house, it threw things about and made a mess—or worse.

Kirk said the fairy folk seemed to have a distinct aversion to Christianity and practiced “no discernible religion.” They would vanish at the mention of God or Christ. In place of prayers or the Bible, their faith seemed to revolve around charms and spells. Charms and spells were also their principal weapons against humans and each other.

Kirk concluded that the fairy folk weren’t inherently wicked. They seldom did humans serious harm. Kirk argued that they were just another part of God’s creation, estranged from their creator, perhaps, and displaced by humans.

Kirk got his information mostly from highlanders. By far the most important of Kirk’s informants possessed what he called second sight. This is a psychic power that mostly occurs during fits and raptures. It supposedly gave the ability to see and hear the fairy folk and even predict the future.

## Djinn

The Middle East has its own traditions of invisible, shape-shifting beings, which are broadly lumped under the name of djinn. Belief in the djinn predates Islam, though much of what we know about them today is filtered through the Islamic lens. They are mentioned numerous times in the Quran, which has a whole sura, or chapter, named after them.

They aren't regarded as mythological. Like Kirk's highland fairies, the djinn have an organized society complete with tribes and kings. They also prefer subterranean dwellings. Djinn are long-lived but not immortal, and they are morally ambiguous, though they can adopt religion if they choose. They can assume any form; their natural bodies are immaterial.

The basic story is that God created the djinn out of "smokeless fire." They were, in effect, God's first people. But after fashioning Adam from clay, God demanded that his earlier creations bow before the new favorite. Some grudgingly obeyed. But one of them, Iblis, stubbornly refused.

Sometimes referred to as an angel, Iblis is more commonly identified as a powerful king of the djinn. He didn't disobey because he didn't love God. Instead, Iblis claimed that he loved God solely and absolutely, and he would never bow to anyone else, even if God commanded it.

Still, one might suspect that Iblis and his kind were miffed about being supplanted. Iblis became ash-Shaitan—Satan or the devil—in Islam. Yet he didn't disobey God out of vanity or hatred but out of devotion.

That created an interesting theological paradox that presumably explains why the almighty, after condemning Iblis and his followers to damnation, deferred the sentence until the end of time. In the meantime, Iblis and the djinn were free to torment and perplex the children of Adam. Iblis isn't the enemy of God; he's the enemy of mankind.

Djinn, like fairies, come in different varieties and temperaments. The most numerous are the green djinn. They're mischievous shape-shifters but not malicious. They're also insatiably curious about humans, so they are the most likely to be encountered. Yellow djinn tend to keep to themselves. Red djinn are the followers of Iblis, and they work constantly for the downfall of the

human race. They fit the common conception of demons. Rather than launch direct attacks, they prey upon human weaknesses like lust, greed, and vanity, goading humans into destroying themselves.

The blue djinn, or marids, are reputedly worse. But thankfully, they are rare and are not too interested in humans. They also fight the red djinn. The rare black djinn are an aristocracy just below angels. They're also fairly hostile but seldom encountered.

## Other Cultures' Others

Many additional cultures have different ways of describing the Others. India has traditions of trickster nature spirits termed yakshas. China has the quasi-demonic mogwai and the shape-shifting huli jing. Japan's fairies are the yōsei.

Native American legends include nature spirits and small, secretive people. For instance, the Pequot and Mohegan peoples of New England—some of the first to come in contact with Europeans—told of the Makiawisug, who were dangerous if molested but generally benevolent when treated with respect. The Iroquois had the Jogah, who were shape-shifting nature spirits that—like fairies and djinn—had their own society and tribes.

To the west, the Crow Nation had a semi-friendly—if very cautious—relationship with the Nirumbee, or Little People, of the Pryor Mountains. In Mexico, the Aztecs and others dealt with the Chanenque, who were yet another version of pint-sized mischievous nature spirits. Like Pan, they could inspire intense fear in humans.

Fairies made another notable appearance during the early 20th century. In England in 1917, two young cousins—Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright—took five photographs (shown on the following pages) that appeared to capture the cavorting of winged sprites. Experts declared the photos genuine, or at least not provable fakes.



One of the most outspoken believers was Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. In 1922, he wrote a book about it: *The Coming of the Fairies*. In the 1980s, the elderly Frances and Elsie finally confessed that the photos were fakes, or at least that four of the photos were—though they continued to insist they really had seen fairies.

Their tale is one that appears repeatedly, with infinite variations. In occultism, the importance of these beings is that they're the most accessible contact to a hidden world and expanded reality. They're a gateway. And unlike gods or other powerful entities, the Others—by any name—are very much like us.



**THE COTTINGLEY FAIRIES—PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
FRANCES GRIFFITHS AND ELSIE WRIGHT**









## Reading

El-Zein, Amira. *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*. Syracuse University Press, 2017.

Kirk, Robert. *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*. Dover Publications, 2008.

## Questions

- 1 What would you do if you encountered a faun?
- 2 Can you think of more examples of Others beyond the ones in this chapter?
- 3 Fairies supposedly have an aversion to which of these materials?
  - a gold
  - b iron
  - c silver
  - d lead

## ANSWER

3. b. iron



# The Christmas Tree and Other Rituals

**R**ituals are at the heart of many religious events, from christenings and bar mitzvahs to the Islamic hajj. This chapter explores the occult concepts and symbolism embedded in some of these rituals, along with other activities.

## Basics of Rituals

Rituals can be performed once or regularly. They can occur at a specific time and place or anywhere. They can be public or private. Participants may be acutely aware of what they're doing or obliviously going through the motions.

Either way, rituals express intent. The intent might be something as simple as creating a Christmas-like atmosphere or as complex as inducing a transformative spiritual experience. It can be helpful to think of a ritual like a chemistry experiment: The ingredients (or ritual steps) must be combined in a particular order, in particular amounts, for particular amounts of time, often under particular conditions. Rituals, especially public rituals, may also be performances.

## The Christmas Tree Ritual

The Christmas tree ritual is grounded in the Germanic lands of northern Europe and the ancient Yule traditions that arose there. There, evergreens grew in abundance. The climate's most important feature was long, cold, dark winters. Amid freezing temperatures and deep snow, pines and their kin stayed green. It made them special, even magical. They were a potent symbol of earth's continuing vitality amid the season of death.

Today, a Christmas tree in a household represents the power of nature, which has sustained the household's occupants for the past year and hopefully will do so throughout the coming winter. From an occult perspective, a symbol is more than mere representation; it's an embodiment, a stand-in. The Christmas tree is a stand-in for the god or goddess of nature.

In some traditions, the deity must ritually die each winter to be reborn come spring. The fertility of the earth is reborn at the same time. The anointed tree thus becomes an altar to this deity, and the presents placed around it are symbolic offerings to be blessed and dispersed to others. But the ritual is more than paying homage and giving thanks. Here, Dutch writer and researcher Tony van Renterghem sees something ancient.



According to van Renterghem, the strands of lights transform the evergreen into a stand-in for a primordial, lightning-struck flaming tree. And that, in turn, represents humankind's first and most important gift: fire, the thing that separated us from the beasts and the source of all further invention.

## Santa Claus

The occult symbolism of the Yule season isn't limited to trees. Consider the personification of modern Christmas, Santa Claus. Modern Santa—especially the American version—is mostly the creation of 20th-century advertising. But as a symbol, he's much older. Van Renterghem, in his 1995 book *When Santa Was a Shaman*, argues that Santa Claus is the evolution of the prehistoric shaman, or, at a deeper level, the god of nature himself: Pan. Van Renterghem bases this theory on an analysis of the Santa figure—Sinterklaas—in his native Holland. Sinterklaas became the namesake and rough template for the American version.

Sinterklaas isn't exactly a jolly embodiment of holiday cheer. He brings gifts but can also bring punishment, to the point of kidnapping bad children and carrying them off to some awful fate. The Dutch Santa leaves most of the dirty work to his diminutive sidekick Zwarte Piet, a goblin familiar.



## SINTERKLAAS

The American Santa got his start in an 1823 poem by Clement Moore, *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, better known as *The Night before Christmas*. Later, the modern American Santa Claus emerged in 1931 when the Coca-Cola Company commissioned artist Haddon Sundbloom to come up with the cheerful, white-bearded, Coke-swilling Santa familiar today.

## The Hajj

Arabia and Islam feature an elaborate ritual known as the hajj. This pilgrimage to Mecca is something that every devout Muslim is supposed to perform at least once in their lifetime. Each year, millions of people go to great effort and expense to do just that.

The pilgrimage must take place during a specific period of time, roughly a single week in the last month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Participants must prepare with a thorough ritual cleansing, eventually donning a white seamless garment. The garment denotes humility and simplicity as well as the equality of all before God. Then it's time to enter the holy precinct of the Great Mosque, or Masjid al-Harām.

Here, an important stop is the Kaaba, a cube-shaped building in the middle of a large courtyard. Pilgrims circle it counterclockwise seven times—no more, no less. The eastern corner of the Kaaba holds the Black Stone. Smashed, desecrated, and stolen at various points in history, the Black Stone is today a collection of rocks held together in a cement matrix. But it still carries the same importance. If possible, each pilgrim should kiss the stone, but pointing at it a number of times will suffice.



**BLACK STONE AT THE KAABA**

Next, pilgrims go to the nearby hillocks of Marwa and Safa and walk back and forth between them seven times. Then it's off to the holy Zamzam Well. This is followed by a trip to Mount Arafat, where the Prophet Muhammad gave his last sermon and where pilgrims spend the day praying for forgiveness. After that, pilgrims go to the plain of Muzdalifah, where they participate in more prayers of praise and repentance.

At Muzdalifah, the pilgrims scoop up some pebbles, which are used to pelt the remains of three ancient pillars. Finally comes the sacrifice of an animal, almost always a sheep, with the proviso that two-thirds of its meat must be given to the poor. In previous times, everyone was supposed to kill their own sheep. Today, this is mostly done by paying a local slaughterhouse.

Last comes beard-trimming for men and hair-trimming for women. Then it's back to the regular world.

The hajj is a great example of ritual not only because it has so many parts but also because they're all loaded with significance. Interestingly, much of the ritual predates Islam.

The Kaaba is said to mark the spot where Adam built the first altar to God. Before Muhammad removed paganism from Mecca in 630 CE, the Kaaba served as a temple for some 360 idols and holy objects, including a portrait of Mary and Jesus.

But the Kaaba's most important object of veneration is the Black Stone. People had long journeyed to Mecca to circle it and kiss it. The exact reason isn't clear; that's the occult part. One theory is that its mystical significance lies in it being a meteorite. Another story is that it fell from heaven as a gift from God to Adam, and its once snow-white appearance has turned black from the accumulated sins of Adam's progeny. Yet another tale holds that Muhammad himself placed the stone in the Kaaba years before he became a prophet.

All of this attests that the stone has some occult significance that is acknowledged without, perhaps, being consciously understood—just like a Christmas tree. Note that the stone is circumambulated exactly seven times, a number with its own occult significance. The three pillars that pilgrims ritually stone represent the devil.

## GERMAN FAIRY LORE

Germany has a rich tradition of fairy lore, from the brownie-like Heinzelmännchen and mischievous kobolds to the downright scary Krampus, who is sometimes called the Christmas devil.



Racing back and forth between Marwa and Safa emulates the desperate search for water by Abraham's wife Hajar, a search that was fulfilled when merciful Allah sent the angel Gabriel to reveal the well of Zamzam. The animal sacrifice is the Arab version of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, with Abraham's other son Ishmael as the would-be sacrificial victim.

It's both an acknowledgement of God's power and his mercy. Thus, it's an acknowledgement of occult power. The sheep is the same substitute, stand-in, or scapegoat found in so many sacrificial rituals.

## The Ghost Dance

The American West during the late 19th century spawned another notable example of a ritual. Because of the actions of white newcomers, the previous several hundred years were a collective disaster for Native Americans. Their lands were lost, their numbers decimated, and much of their way of life destroyed. Armed resistance proved ineffective and increasingly suicidal. The only hope was the intervention of powers from the unseen world.



THE GHOST DANCE BY THE OJALLALA BRICK AT PINE RIDGE AGENCY, S.D. (Sketch by FREDERICK H. HARRIS FOR THE BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, 1890)

In 1869, in the wilds of northern Nevada, a Paiute shaman called Wodziwob began having visions. He foresaw natural cataclysms that would kill the whites or make them vanish. More than that, all the Native dead would return, many of them riding a miraculous giant train out of the east. Traditional life would be restored, and everyone would live forever in peace.

The prophecy sparked a ritual dubbed the Ghost Dance. The basic idea was that by performing a simple circle dance, sometimes for days, participants would enter a trance state. In that state, the dancers focused their intention on manifesting the prophecy and resurrection of the dead.

## Rituals in Everyday Life

While rituals can and do tie in with religions, peoples, and nations, they also exist in everyday life, usually in such mundane ways that we barely notice them. For instance, many people have lucky shirts, hats, or shoes. Some people are particular about how certain objects are arranged or the sequence in which they complete certain tasks.

These personal quirks can be personal rituals. For instance, a person might associate their lucky shirt with some previous positive event or outcome, and by wearing the same thing again, they hope to ensure the same result. They're modeling what they want to manifest.

## Reading

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Thoth Publications, 2000.

van Renterghem, Tony. *When Santa Was a Shaman: The Ancient Origins of Santa Claus and the Christmas Tree*. Llewellyn Publications, 1995.

## Questions

- 1 What are some examples of day-to-day rituals beyond those discussed in this chapter?
- 2 What is the name of the Christmas devil of German folklore?
  - a Krampus
  - b Gottwald
  - c Waldteufel
  - d Zwarte Piet

## ANSWER

2. a. Krampus



# Practical Magic: Love, Money, and Health

**P**ractical magic generally concerns itself with matters like healing illness, securing wealth, finding love, seeking protection, and exacting revenge. This chapter summarizes several types of practical magic, including the creation of a golem, the evil eye, anti-wart techniques, and wealth-generating techniques. It also looks at examples of practical magic showing up in matters of love and war.



## The Golem

The golem is a magically created creature of European Jewish folklore and is the titular character in a 1969 novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Notable references to it also date to the 16th and 17th centuries. The golem is mentioned in kabbalistic texts, too, such as the *Sefer yetzira* from the Middle Ages. The book's name means "Book of Formation," and it purports to reveal the secrets of God's creation, especially the secrets of creating living things. The *Sefer yetzira* is believed to have been based on still-older esoteric works.

Some argue that the spells to create a golem originate with King Solomon. But the basic template starts with Adam, a lump of clay into which God breathed life. That is basically what a golem is: a human effigy made of clay and animated by magical means. The word *golem* means "unformed matter" in translation.

Even God found that creating life was one thing and controlling it another. Adam quickly disobeyed. Likewise, the creator of a golem must be ever mindful of their creature going rogue.

The best-known golem story takes place in Prague during the late 1500s, and it centers on the historical personage of Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel. Rabbi Loew was a Talmudic scholar and kabbalist who, per the story, used his occult knowledge to craft a clay man and bring it to life by placing a slip of paper bearing the name of God into its mouth.



## GOLEM

Loew created his golem, who he named Joseph, as a guardian for the Jewish community of Prague—a community, so the story goes, that was threatened by the erratic policies of Habsburg emperor Rudolf II. Contrary to the image of the golem as a lumbering statue, Josef is said to have had the power to become invisible and even summon the dead. The golem also had a mind—or at least a will. In one version of the story, he falls in love.

As the tale usually goes, one Sabbath eve, Rabbi Loew forgot to remove the magic paper from the golem's mouth, which resulted in the creature going on a murderous rampage. The rabbi eventually snatched the magical paper from its mouth, and the instantly immobilized golem was stashed away in the attic of Prague's Old New Synagogue. However, this tale wasn't recorded until the 19th century, and Emperor Rudolf was actually friendly toward Prague's Jews.

Prague's records contain no record of any murderous rampage by living statues. A search of the Old New Synagogue's attic in the 1880s found no golem. But that doesn't stop some from believing that he's still hidden away, awaiting a magician to reanimate him. This story is likely based on an earlier tale involving another rabbi, Elijah Ba'al Shem of Chelm, Poland, who supposedly crafted his golem to perform mundane chores.

## The Evil Eye

The evil eye is one of the oldest and most universal elements of practical magic. While commonly associated with the Mediterranean and the Middle East, something like the evil eye is recognized almost everywhere. The source of the evil isn't really the eyes but the mind. Think of it as malicious intention—magical intent—communicated by a dirty look.



Someone might not even be aware that they're giving off evil-eye effects. The evil eye can be unconscious, motivated by envy or some perceived slight. And some arguably project it more powerfully than others. Children are considered especially vulnerable to the evil eye because their innocence makes them less aware of bad intentions in others.

## Removing Warts

A medicinal form of practical magic involves removing, or hexing, warts. The physical cause of warts, so far as anyone can tell, is a virus. But warts have an uncanny tendency to abruptly appear and disappear.

A common spell to deal with warts entails rubbing the offending nodule with a piece of potato while saying something like, "As this potato rots, so shall this wart disappear." It's always important to state the intent aloud. Then, the potato is buried—preferably during a full moon—and, as it decays and the moon wanes, the wart hopefully fades away. Another version is to have a child draw a picture of the wart, then burn or bury the picture.

## Wealth and Love

One common aim in practical magic is the acquisition of wealth. Some people preach the importance of visualizing success and projecting intent. Look and act like a rich person, the argument goes, and the money will follow. Additionally, the use of so-called money magic charms includes things like carrying a lucky coin or a \$100 bill consecrated with a special ritual.

Another type of practical magic is devoted to finding love. Love spells and potions are probably the most common example. Various recipes appear all over the internet, most involving things like crystals, candles, and incense. One of the most famous users of love spells and potions was the Marquise de Montespan, the 17th-century mistress of France's King Louis XIV. The royal court at Versailles was a snake pit where rivals always vied for the king's affections, so Montespan figured she needed all the help she could get.

## War

Occult practices have also appeared in war. In the late 7th century, a man named Kallinikos arrived in Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. He has variously been described as a Greek, Jew, or Egyptian. Kallinikos is also often labeled an architect. He was really an alchemist—the closest one could get at the time to a chemical engineer.

Using his knowledge—and probably improving on an earlier formula—Kallinikos crafted a terrifying incendiary weapon commonly referred to as Greek fire. In 673, the Byzantines used it to destroy an Arab fleet attacking Constantinople, and—to equally devastating effect—for several centuries thereafter. Greek fire had much to do with prolonging the empire's existence until its collapse in 1453. Greek fire was mostly deployed on ships and was fired from a flamethrower mounted on the bow.

### GREEK FIRE



Its nasty surprise was that it could not be extinguished by water. According to some accounts, it burned even more fiercely in contact with water. Like all alchemical concoctions, the formula for Greek fire was a closely guarded secret, and, typical of alchemy, it was further shrouded in occult terminology. The ingredients certainly included petroleum compounds, sulfur, and quicklime. But the rest are a guess. Never known to more than a handful of people, the formula was lost sometime around Byzantium's fall and remains a mystery today.

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## Questions

- 1 Where have you seen the concept of the evil eye show up in literature and films?
- 2 A common spell to deal with warts entails rubbing the offending nodule with which of these?
  - a a duck
  - b a potato
  - c a leek
  - d an onion

## ANSWER

2. b. a potato



# Alchemy, Astrology, and Divination

**T**he main ways to access the occult are the three pillars of occultism: alchemy, astrology, and ritual magic. Roughly speaking, alchemy is the magic of things. It mostly involves the manipulation of physical matter, especially the transformation of one thing into another. Astrology can be thought of as the magic of the heavens—of cosmic forces. Ritual magic is a broad category that involves summoning and communicating with intelligences or spirits for the purposes of aid or information. Ritual magic also covers various forms of divination, or trying to discern the secrets of past, present, and future.

## Alchemy

Alchemy, as the magic of things, involves the manipulation and transmutation of physical matter. This rests on seven basic operations: calcination, dissolution, separation, conjunction, fermentation, distillation, and coagulation. Essentially, it's all about heating, mixing, and separating various compounds to create others.

Alchemy was born in the campfires of our prehistoric ancestors. However, alchemy is no different than modern chemistry. Put another way, chemistry is simply alchemy stripped of magical intention.

The main goal of the alchemist was the magnum opus—the “great work.” This is usually described as the transformation of a base metal—normally lead—into gold. In ancient times, an alchemist who claimed to accomplish this deed was almost certainly faking. The main purpose of so-called gold-making was to attract the attention—and the gold—of people who already had wealth.

Thus, a clever alchemist might find the means to pursue the real magnum opus: the quest for the philosopher's stone, or *lapis philosophorum*. In addition to being the key ingredient in the transformation of base metals, the stone could supposedly extend life.

## HERMES TRISMEGISTUS

Hermes Trismegistus is the name of the author of the *Emerald Tablet*. This work is one of the foundational texts of Western occultism. It's a short piece that contains the notable line, “As above, so below.”

Importantly, Hermes Trismegistus is also the reputed author of a work dubbed the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Most of this probably originated in Hellenistic Egypt shortly before the Common Era. The *Corpus* consists of two parts respectively dealing with the technical and philosophical aspects of alchemy, astrology, and ritual magic. The technical part explains the how. The philosophical part delves into the why.

The philosopher's stone was also believed to be a catalyst for the ultimate magnum opus: the purification and perfection of one's soul and transformation to a higher state of being. Arguably, turning lead into gold was merely an allegory for this. The classical alchemist aimed for immortality and omnipotence—that is, they aimed to become a god.

## Astrology

Alchemical operations were thought to be greatly influenced by timing. Certain hours, days, and months were believed to be more propitious than others. That idea is relevant to astrology. Essentially, astrology is a form of divination derived from the movements of the planets and stars.

Astrology is not just about predicting the future. It is also about revealing the past and understanding the present. Astrology's origins and its evolution are ancient and murky. As far back as 30,000 years ago, humans were tracking lunar cycles. And just about every man-made prehistoric structure has some kind of astronomical alignment.

The earliest civilizations, like those in Egypt and Mesopotamia, had a component known as mundane astrology. This basically links celestial alignments to earthly events. For example, tracking the movements of heavenly bodies gave the ability to predict the seasons.

But in mundane astrology, the planets and stars weren't assumed to cause these events. Instead, the celestial bodies merely heralded events. They had little application to the everyday lives of everyday people.

However, by around 400 BCE, the notion of magical astrology had emerged. This held that celestial bodies—especially the five planets known at the time—possessed intelligence and intent, and they occultly influenced every living thing. Magical astrology went hand in hand with the development of the zodiac, which divided the heavens into 12 sections, each governed by a sign such as Aries, Pisces, Gemini, or Scorpio.



That further gave rise to natal astrology, which maintained that the celestial alignment at the time of one's birth determined their fate. First appearing in Babylonia, these ideas spread to Greece and Rome as well as Persia and India.

Meanwhile, Chinese culture birthed its own form of astrology. It, too, was based on 12 signs—all various animals. They were connected to a cycle of 12 years, not months. Anyone born in a year of the rat, for instance, was believed to share basic traits.



## Tarot Cards

A notable form of divination is the tarot. It's an aspect of the occult that many people have a passing acquaintance with. Tarot falls under the category of cartomancy, or divination by cards. Most scholarly opinion is that tarot cards, or something like them, first showed up in 15th-century Italy. They were used for playing games until the 1700s, when they acquired their modern reputation as occult tools.

However, the divinatory aspect may have always been there, eventually revealing itself in the more tolerant atmosphere of the Enlightenment. The cards might not have existed prior to the 1400s, but they encoded much older occult imagery and concepts. Many tarot images seem oddly out of place for innocent parlor games.



TAROT CARDS

The standard tarot deck came to include four suits—pentacles, swords, wands, and cups—of 14 cards each. Truly separating tarot decks from other modern playing cards are the 22 additional major arcana cards. The major arcana include cards representing the moon, the devil, the wheel of fortune, the hanged man, death, and the magician, all elaborately illustrated. Most of these images have alchemical, astrological, or other occult significance.

But the interpretation, or reading, of tarot depends on many factors. First, each card has an upright and inverted meaning. For instance, the magician can indicate willpower and creation or trickery and illusion. More subtleties abound, depending on a card's relationships to the other cards around it. But the intent and intuitive skill of the reader are also important. Yet tarot can sometimes produce unsettlingly accurate results.

## ***I-Ching***

The Chinese divination system of *I-Ching* seems to have come together around 500 BCE. Its roots are probably much older. The *I-Ching* claims to decipher meaning from seemingly random events or chance. This practice is known as cleromancy. *I-Ching* started with casting sticks. Today, it generally entails tossing three coins and seeing whether heads or tails comes up.



Heads has a numerical value of three, and tails has a value of two, so each toss yields a number between six and nine. The results are characterized as either yin or yang.

After a person focuses their mind, or intention, on something they want clarified, the coins are tossed six times. Each result, depending on the arrangement of heads and tails, is recorded—bottom to top—as a solid or broken line. The end result is one of 64 possible hexagrams, each of which has a basic meaning like abundance, inner truth, obstruction, and so on.

The *I-Ching* gives a more detailed analysis of each hexagram. These are generally quite cryptic and are open to wide and personalized interpretation.

## Ritual Magic

Ritual magic involves summoning aid or information from the intelligences of the unseen world. These can be roughly divided into friendly and hostile. Gods, guardian angels, and ancestral spirits are among the former, while demons or djinn populate the latter. Summoning good spirits is dubbed *theurgy*, while calling up evil spirits is dubbed *goetia*.

There's a critical difference in how each is summoned. Benign entities are invoked—that is, they are called upon. The caller asks for a favor, and it's up to the entity whether they grant it. Malevolent or potentially malevolent entities are evoked—they are called forth, usually against their will. The summoner needs to be ready to tame the entity.

In magical terms, protective measures most often take the form of inscribed circles and powerful spells that keep the entity at bay and compel it to do what the summoner wants. When the task is complete, a banishing spell sends the entity back where they came from—hopefully.

Summoning entities can be about seeking spiritual enlightenment, material gain, or vengeance. At its highest level, it's about a concept termed *henosis*, or mystical union with the divine. In occult practice, everything depends on intent.

## Kabbalah

Kabbalah is often described as mystical Judaism. But while it's firmly rooted in Hebraic tradition, Kabbalah's basic concepts and mechanics are highly adaptable. Kabbalah's origins are obscure. Some trace it back to ancient Babylonia. Others argue that it's a form of Jewish Gnosticism.

One of Kabbalah's foundational works, the *Zohar*, or *Book of Splendor*, first appeared in 13th-century Spain. Another, the *Sefer yetzira*, or *Book of Formation*, is older, but no one seems certain just how old. Both works contain wide-ranging discussions on the nature of God and reality and the esoteric interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures, or Torah.

At the center of it all is the Godhead. In what can be thought of as a metaphysical big bang, the Godhead is believed to have willed a vast universe into being. Our physical realm is only a small part of it. This Godhead radiates throughout this universe as 10 emanations, or sephiroth. *Keter*, the crown, is at the top, representing divine will. *Malkhut*, the material world, is at the bottom.

In between, the sephiroth are divided into masculine emotions such as wisdom, kindness, and victory as well as feminine ones like understanding, judgment, and splendor. Also present are the elements of beauty and foundation. Some believe there's an 11th occult sephira termed *da'at*, or knowledge, where all the others converge.

The sephiroth are visually arranged into a set of interlocking triangles that look something like a tree, and they are duly named the Tree of Life. The sephiroth are also connected by 22 lines or paths.

For many students of the Kabbalah, an important tool is a form of numerology called Gematria. The 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet have numerical values ranging from 1 to 400. Words themselves have numerical values, and comparing them can reveal hidden relationships and meanings. For instance, the Hebrew word meaning "life," *chai*, has a value of 18 and is considered lucky. Any word with the same value has a similar connotation. Overall, this topic boils down to the idea that the occult universe is much larger than our raw senses can perceive. Everything is connected.

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## Questions

- 1 Have you ever played around with divination? If so, which method did you use, and what were the results?
- 2 Which work is Hermes Trismegistus known for authoring?
  - a the *Emerald Tablet*
  - b the golden plates
  - c *Red Dragon*
  - d “The Great Carbuncle”

## ANSWER

2. a. the *Emerald Tablet*



# Talking with the Dead

**T**his chapter focuses on the wild world of spirit communication and specifically necromancy, which is communication with the spirits of the departed. The spirits are usually summoned through spells and rituals, but in some cases, the reanimation of a corpse is involved.

## Background on Necromancy

Talking to the dead is a primordial and universal practice. Its roots go back to Stone Age shamans whose job was to communicate with the denizens of the unseen world, including the spirits of ancestors. The ancient Babylonians were thought to be particularly adept at necromancy, as were the Egyptians.



One of the earliest sources with a description of a necromantic ritual is in Homer's *Odyssey*. Coached by the sorceress Circe, Odysseus performed incantations and rituals that enabled him to descend into Hades. Odysseus encountered the spirits of old comrades from the Trojan War such as Achilles. He also encountered his departed mother.

People seek to talk to the dead for two main reasons. One is for reassurance. People long for connection with departed loved ones, and they seek confirmation of life after death. This also points to a desire to know the future, which is related to the second reason: the desire for hidden knowledge.

**DEPICTION OF NECROMANTIC RITUAL  
DESCRIBED IN HOMER'S ODYSSEY**



The idea of necromancy to gain knowledge raises a question: Why would dead people be expected to know anything? One thought is that being on the other side offers the departed access to information denied to the living. The dead, arguably, are outside the limits of the physical world and its rigid matrix of space and time. If there is no time in the land of the dead, then past, present, and future are all the same.

The Hebrew prophets frowned on necromancy. Mainstream Christian churches fully embraced an anti-necromancy view. For about 1,400 years, conversing with—or raising—the dead was a forbidden and punishable activity in the eyes of the church, meaning that it became an exclusively secret, or occult, activity. It was not until the mid-19th century that necromancy openly reemerged with a new name: *spiritualism*.

## Spiritualism

The essential ritual of spiritualism is the *séance*. The word *séance* is a French term meaning “sitting” or “session,” and it almost exclusively came to mean a gathering to invoke spirits. The gathering required a medium through which the spirits communicated and manifested.

The modern concepts of *séance* and medium came together in the salons of 18th-century France. But arguably the real turning point began with three American sisters in March 1848. In the little town of Hydesville in New York, 14-year-old Maggie Fox and her 11-year-old sister Kate started telling their parents about strange noises in their room at night. They described banging or rapping coming from walls and furniture.

The sisters concluded the noises were the work of a restless spirit, a man who'd been murdered in the house some years before. They dubbed him Mr. Splitfoot—a nickname for the devil—and started communicating. The girls convinced their mother and gave demonstrations for neighbors. A Fox sister would command, “Count to five,” and five raps would sound from somewhere in the room.



In time, Maggie and Kate were packed off to live with their older sister Leah in Rochester, New York.

She became the girls' manager and even started claiming mediumistic powers of her own. The young women attracted the attention of a wealthy local couple, Isaac and Amy Post. The Posts had recently lost their daughter and desperately wanted to contact her.

Helped by the Posts, the Fox sisters demonstrated their necromantic abilities in a Rochester theater to an audience of 400. Skeptics were invited and couldn't find evidence of fraud. The Fox sisters next took their act to New York City, where they played to packed houses.

A man named Andrew Jackson Davis also jumped on the Fox bandwagon. Davis identified himself as a spiritual messenger and faith healer. He claimed that the Fox sisters were proof that America was the center of a spiritual awakening that would cast aside the veil separating the worlds of the living and the dead.

In the decades that followed, spiritualist churches sprang up across the country and abroad. While most of these establishments professed to be Christian, they made spirit communication the central part of their belief system and rituals. By the 1880s, it was said there were 8 million spiritualists in America and Europe. While probably an exaggeration, there's no doubt that necromancy had risen in popularity. The year 1893 saw the formation of the National Spiritualist Association. Similar groups would follow.



## HOUDINI'S CRUSADE

The famous magician Harry Houdini went on a crusade against what he called the "spiritualist racket" for several years. Houdini thought mediums, psychics, fortune-tellers, and the rest of their ilk bilked the gullible public through trickery. Practitioners and advocates of spiritualism, in turn, denounced Houdini as a liar and slanderer who lumped honest mediums in with a few bad apples. Houdini went so far as to support a resolution that would ban fortune-telling in Washington DC, but the proposed legislation died in congressional committee.

## Hippolyte Rivail

Interesting events unfolded in France as well. In 1855, a French physician and amateur scientist named Hippolyte Rivail attended a séance in Paris. There, a spirit supposedly announced that he was to become spokesman for the dead. Rivail witnessed other phenomena, such as ghostly manifestations and moving furniture.

Rivail decided to make a study of his own. While acknowledging that there was plenty of fraud in the world of spiritualists, he finally concluded that spirit communication was real and terribly important. He adopted the name Allan Kardec—as he is generally known today—on the advice of a spirit guide.

In 1857, he published *The Spirits' Book*, which posed and answered 500 basic questions about the phenomenon. This was succeeded by another book, *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, which sought to reconcile necromancy with Christianity.

## Ouija Boards

No discussion of modern necromancy would be complete without the mention of Ouija boards. It has been said that Ouija boards democratized spirit communication by offering to turn everyone into their own medium.

In one form or another, oracle boards have been around for centuries. But Charles Kennard and partners were the first to patent one in 1891, in Baltimore. To get a patent, one had to provide some evidence that the invention worked. To do that, they brought in a medium, Helen Peters. As evidence, she was asked to have the spirits identify the chief patent officer. They did, and that was apparently good enough for the US Patent Office.

It was also Helen Peters who gave the board its name. Peters supposedly asked the board's controlling spirit what it wished to be called. The reply, "Ouija," was said to mean "good luck."



OUIJA BOARD

## Charles Bailey and Stanford University

California's vaunted Stanford University has ties with psychic research. The railroad magnate and politician Leland Stanford founded the school in 1885. His brother, Thomas Welton Stanford, had become a wealthy businessman in Melbourne, Australia.

Thomas Stanford became fascinated by spirit communication after his wife died in 1870. He started hosting weekly séances at his home. One of the first mediums he sponsored was Fred Evans, an American. Evans purported to channel several messages from Thomas's departed nephew Leland Stanford Jr., which Thomas dutifully relayed to his brother in California.

But Thomas Stanford's biggest discovery was Melbourne native Charles Bailey, who claimed to make items and animals appear from nowhere with the aid of his spirit guide Abdul. Bailey's appearing objects and animals

included an astonishing array of supposedly ancient tablets, amulets, live plants, snakes, and more than 300 live birds, some complete with nests and eggs.

Most of these items ended up in the special collections archive of Stanford University. As a trustee of Stanford University, Thomas Stanford envisioned it as a research center for spiritualism. In 1911, he earmarked \$50,000 for that purpose, and in his final will—seven years later—he left \$526,000 to fund an institute of “psychical research.” (University officials eventually diverted the funds to a new department of psychology.)

Charles Bailey was routinely branded a fake. For instance, the respected London Society for Psychical Research investigated and discovered—among other things—that Bailey’s supposedly Hindu spirit guide, Abdul, didn’t understand Hindi or any other Indian language.

Still, Bailey had supporters, most notably the British author Arthur Conan Doyle. The creator of the detective Sherlock Holmes nurtured an intense interest in spiritualism, going back to the 1880s. Conan Doyle went public with his beliefs in 1916. His reputation suffered accordingly, but he stuck to his guns. To the faithful, he became the so-called Saint Paul of spiritualism.

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## Questions

- 1 Do you think the Fox sisters tapped into something otherworldly?
- 2 What is the central ritual of spiritualism, and what happens during it?

# The Occult Ancient World

**T**his chapter explores the origins and influence of occult ideas and practices from the late Ice Age to the 14th century—most of humanity’s known history. During much of this time, the occult was nothing out of the ordinary. It was as much a part of everyday life as breathing and eating.

## The Trois Frères Cave

One day in 1920, the Jesuit priest and archaeologist Henri Breuil ventured into the unexplored Trois Frères cave in the French Pyrenees. Hundreds of feet in, he entered a small art gallery. The engraved images of prehistoric horses, bison, mammoths, and other animals flickered in the glow of his lamp. There were almost 300 images, created some 15,000 years earlier by unknown artists.

The image that most caught Breuil's attention was a small figure on the ceiling. It was uniquely human, or at least somewhat human, and it seemed to reign over the others. Upon closer inspection, it was clearly a man or woman draped in an animal skin and wearing a set of antlers. Breuil dubbed it The Sorcerer. He sensed that he'd stumbled into a place of mystery and magic.

As a priest, Breuil interpreted the paintings as evidence of nascent human spirituality. Others agreed. British archaeologist Margaret Murray, for one, insisted that The Sorcerer was a depiction of the primordial Horned God, worshipped as Pan in ancient Greece and as the devil by witch cults in 17th-century Europe. These images inarguably show the presence of the occult in the earliest human societies.

The Trois Frères artwork was physically occulted deep in the earth. That was deliberate. No one lived in the cave. Instead, the space was a special place for an occult purpose. The animals are large prey types, which ancient peoples depended upon for survival.

The images were drawn over and over, often on top of one another. That suggests a repetitive action: ritual. Therefore, some speculate that the images were created and created again to conjure up the real thing. In the same way, ritually killing the image of a mammoth might have been to ensure a successful hunt.

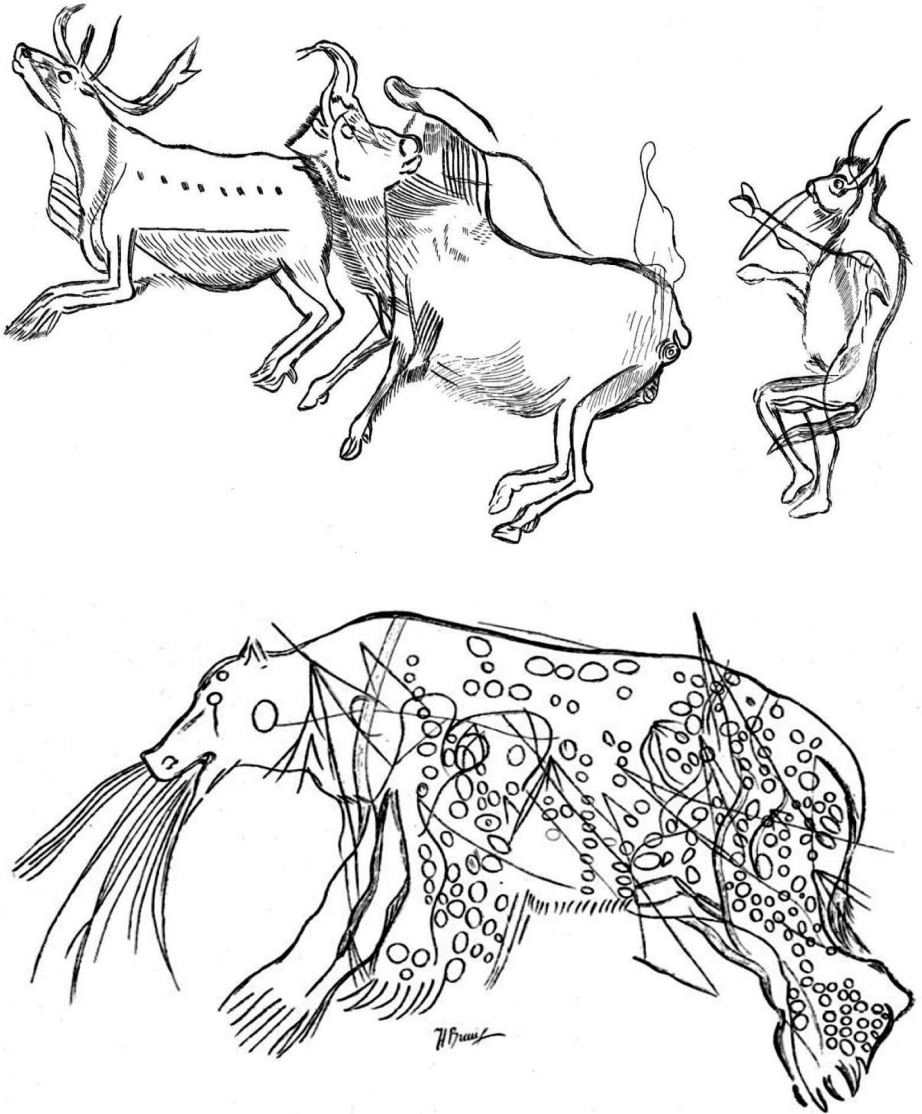
It's possible the mysterious sorcerer was some god of the hunt. Another interpretation is that the image is one of a shaman: the archetype of all medicine men, soothsayers, and prophets to come.





**THE SORCERER**

**VARIOUS IMAGES FOUND IN TROIS FRÈRES CAVE**





## HUMAN SACRIFICE

To modern sensibilities, there's little more horrifying than human sacrifice. However, human sacrifice existed in many early human societies, whether as an occasional act of desperation or as a routine practice. Essentially, it was a bargain between the sacrificer and the god or entity someone was trying to cajole or appease.

The Romans encountered certain societies that practiced sacrifice. For instance, during wars with Carthage, the Romans pointed to the Carthaginians' institutionalized child sacrifice as evidence of their moral degeneracy.

## Ancient Civilizations

The earliest civilizations we know well lived in ancient Mesopotamia. These civilizations started with the mysterious Sumerians and continued through the Babylonians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and so on. The early Mesopotamians recognized a large pantheon of gods and goddesses, plus a bewildering host of spirits—mainly evil—which numbered around 600 in all. So worrisome were these entities that surviving Babylonian records consist largely of omens, exorcisms, and spells meant to control them.

The Chaldeans, who ran Babylon around 600 BCE, were regarded as especially skilled in magic. And this reputation subsequently attached itself to the city of Babylon itself. In the New Testament, Babylon is symbolized by a woman in scarlet and purple, brandishing a chalice of blood and riding a monstrous beast with 7 heads and 10 horns. While there is widespread agreement that the woman and her beast are an allegory, the exact meaning has provoked much debate.

Another name connected with ancient occultism is King Solomon. Among his reputed accomplishments was gaining mastery over demons, or djinn, and compelling them to do his bidding. That's how his name became attached to two later grimoires, or books of spells and incantations.

## EGYPTIANS AND THE WORLD BEYOND

Ancient Egyptian society revolved around a belief in the world beyond, for which one's earthly existence was just preparation. They dedicated huge amounts of time and attention to building houses for the dead. Magic in the form of spells and incantations was woven into everyday life, even in something as simple as food recipes. All this came together in the *Book of the Dead*, a compilation of nearly 200 spells that were intended to guide the soul of the deceased through the treacherous underworld to the true life beyond.

## Divination

Another early occult practice was divination, most importantly in the form of predicting the future. No information is more valuable than knowing what will happen next. The basic assumption is that the occult world encompasses the past, present, and future. Piercing the veil allows one to tap into a vast sea of knowledge.

The answer to how this is supposedly done lies in another fundamental occult concept: Everything that happens is an omen. A coincidence isn't an accident, it's a sign.

An early example of divination is the Chinese use of oracle bones. This usually employed the shoulder blade of an ox or the bottom shell of a turtle. Questions were carved into the bone, which was cast into a fire until it cracked. Interpreting how the cracks interacted with the inscription supposedly revealed the answer.

## Pythagoras

Today, Pythagoras is known for the Pythagorean theorem, but he is also perhaps the most important figure in ancient Greek occultism. In his day, Pythagoras was an eccentric cult leader in the city of Croton. According to legend, Pythagoras spent his early years wandering around Egypt, Babylon, and perhaps India, soaking up esoteric knowledge like a sponge.

Around 530 BCE, he established an occult school or commune in Croton. Rather like modern-day cult members, these Pythagoreans were sworn to secrecy, surrendered personal possessions, and were bound by various rigid rules, especially regarding diet.

Pythagoras is said to have imposed strict vegetarianism. That was related to one of his key occult concepts, metempsychosis, which involves the transmigration of the soul from one body to another. It is essentially reincarnation, in which a soul passes from a human to an animal, or even to a plant, and vice versa. He reasoned that meat, fish, and even beans could harbor souls, so he banned the eating of them.

Perhaps Pythagoras's most important theory was the notion that numbers underlie everything and are the building blocks of reality, both visible and invisible. He's often credited with inventing numerology. He didn't, but he did play an important role in spreading number-centric concepts among the ancient Greeks.

Pythagoras was greatly admired by both Plato and Aristotle. But he was not so popular among the inhabitants of Croton, it seems. Around 510, they destroyed the Pythagorean commune and might have killed him in the process. By other accounts, he escaped and lived out his final days elsewhere.

## **Thaumaturgy and Stage Magic**

Another type of occultism that was popular in classical times was thaumaturgy, or miracle working. This is displayed today by stage magicians who appear to levitate, make elephants disappear, and saw assistants in half. It's a good bet that most ancient thaumaturges were the same: stage magicians performing elaborate tricks.

Stage magic relies on the mastery of tricks, or physical operations, to create an illusion of something miraculous. Once the illusion is perfected, it almost never fails.

## **Divine Power and Simon**

Miracles attributed to Christian saints are often said to be the working of the Holy Spirit, not the saints themselves. But divine power is, by its nature, a manifestation of the occult. It emanates from the unseen world and invisibly influences our own. The Holy Spirit is still a spirit.

A contemporary of Jesus—and, according to some, his imitator or rival—was Simon the Sorcerer, also known as Simon Magus. He's sometimes called the first Antichrist. Simon was said to be a native of Samaria, in Palestine, and an early convert to Christianity. But according to the New Testament, he was a faithless schemer who tried unsuccessfully to buy the secret of the Holy Spirit from Saint Peter.



### SIMON THE SORCERER (SIMON MAGUS)

Undeterred, Simon reputedly founded his own religious sect in Palestine. His sect seems to have been a variation of Gnosticism, a mystical system that believes in salvation by knowledge, especially occult knowledge.

Simon supposedly boasted that he could replicate every miracle of Christ. As the story goes, Simon's fame brought him to Rome during the reign of Nero. He was said to have arranged a big show in the Forum, where—among other marvelous acts—he levitated to demonstrate his power.

The saints Peter and Paul were said to be present at the performance and to have prayed mightily for the Lord to smite the imposter. Depending on the version of the story, Simon Magus was either torn to pieces in the air by demons or simply fell to his death.

## Reading

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## Questions

- 1 What do you think prehistoric artists were trying to accomplish in their cave paintings?
- 2 Did ancient Mesopotamians have a large or small pantheon of gods and goddesses?





# Vampires, Werewolves, and Zombies

**T**his chapter explores the origins of three beings that have become stock characters in popular culture: the vampire, the werewolf, and the zombie. Occult beliefs and practices influenced the origins and perceptions of these creatures.

## The Beast of Gévaudan

In 1764, reports began of a murderous presence in the Gévaudan area of south-central France. Eventually, this entity came to be known as the Beast of Gévaudan.

Over the next three years, it would be credited with killing at least 100 people and injuring another 50, most of them found partially devoured and many of them decapitated. Other counts placed the number of slain at 300. Almost all of the victims were women and children.

The general assumption was that the assailant was a wolf, albeit an abnormally large one. Wolves and wolf attacks weren't unusual in Gévaudan. But wolves tended to prey on livestock and hunt in packs, and when they did take humans, the victims were usually small children.



Moreover, attacks on humans typically involved rabid wolves, yet not one of the people bitten by the beast came down with that disease, adding to the mystery of the creature's identity. Some began to suspect the supernatural at work—specifically, a *loup-garou*, or werewolf.

The beast's emergence coincided with the appearance of mass media. Early newspapers picked up the story and spread it across France, especially in Paris. Scholars and scientists flocked to study the phenomenon. Even the government got involved. King Louis XV dispatched his royal huntsman to track down the beast, sending along thousands of troops to assist.

As the attacks increased, so did the number of eyewitnesses. Still, all the king's men, and all the experts, couldn't figure out what it was. They still haven't. Various theories include a lion, a hyena, a prehistoric predator, or even a human serial killer with an armored dog. A werewolf is hardly more fantastic than some of these theories.

France had seen a rash of *loup-garou* cases in the 1500s, complete with lurid tales of murder and cannibalism. The Beast of Gévaudan appeared at the tail end of a roughly 200-year period that saw large amounts of worry about werewolves in Europe. This phenomenon is commonly regarded as a form of mass hysteria that ran parallel to another: a widespread witch hunt, during which an estimated 50,000 men and women were put to death.

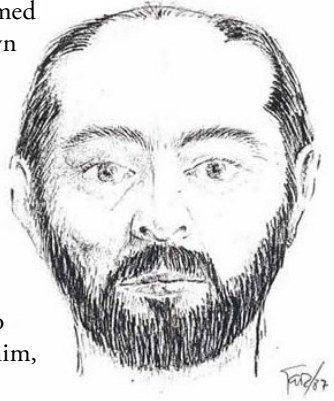
## PETER STUMPP

A disturbing real-life case is that of Peter Stumpp, or, as he became known, the Werewolf of Bedburg. Stumpp was a well-to-do farmer in the German Rhineland. In 1589, he went on trial for murder, cannibalism, incest, and practicing witchcraft. With some encouragement from torture, he confessed to killing and devouring 14 children and 2 pregnant women. Today, Stumpp is regarded as an early example of a serial killer. But at his trial, he detailed a long and intimate association with witchcraft and occult practices. Stumpp's horrific crimes were acts of extreme transgression, deliberately violating existing moral codes or any sense of decency. Upon conviction, Stumpp was subjected to a gruesome execution.

## Manuel Blanco Romasanta

Later, Spain saw a disturbing wave of werewolf-related killings of its own. A self-described werewolf named Manuel Blanco Romasanta stood trial in the town of Allariz in 1852 for the murder of 13 people, almost all women and children.

Romasanta readily confessed to the killings. But his defense was that he claimed to have unwillingly committed the crimes under the baleful influence of a curse. According to his tale, he'd been walking along a mountain trail some 13 years earlier when he'd encountered two large wolves. The animals, instead of attacking him, just glared at him.



Romasanta claimed he was overcome by some force, collapsed to the ground, and, after violent convulsions, found himself transformed into a wolf. He then joined the other two in slaughtering livestock and people alike. Thereafter, Romasanta insisted, the curse periodically took control of him.

The court was skeptical of Romasanta's story. The prosecutor demanded that he prove his testimony by transforming into a wolf. Romasanta apologized that he couldn't because the curse lasted for only 13 years and had just expired. He was convicted of nine murders and sentenced to death.

Romasanta evaded his reckoning. A French hypnotist known as Mr. Phillips petitioned that he be allowed to study Romasanta. The hypnotist believed that werewolfism—lycanthropy, to give its clinical name—was a genuine psychological condition and said it was curable using hypnosis. In response, Spain's Queen Isabella II commuted Romasanta's sentence to life imprisonment. The hypnotist didn't get far in his investigation, however, before Romasanta died of natural causes in 1863.

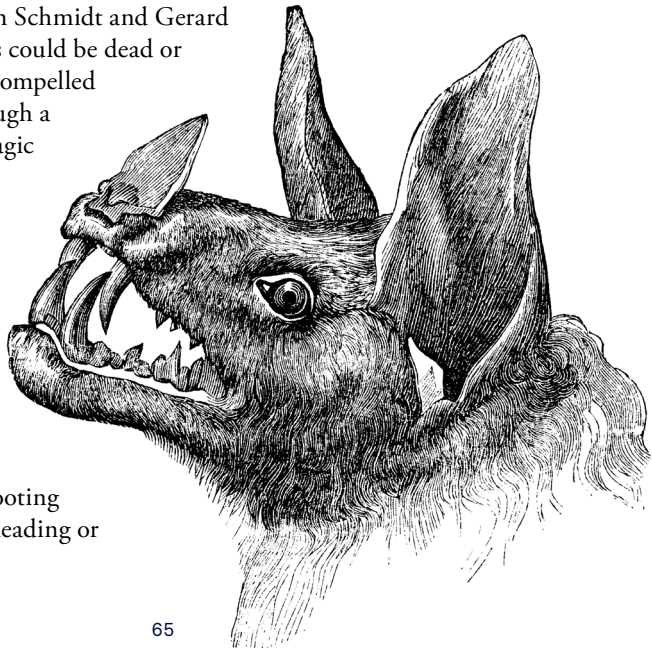
## Vampires

From ancient Greece came references that later evolved into the vampire mythos. But up to the 19th century, there was no clear distinction between what we'd describe today as vampires, werewolves, zombies, demons, or even malevolent ghosts.

Our modern conception of the vampire is drawn principally from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* and subsequent interpretations in films, television, and popular literature. In the process, vampires ended up becoming portrayed as sex symbols more than objects of terror, a view that has virtually no basis in folklore.

Stoker lifted many of his details from an 1885 magazine piece titled "Transylvanian Superstitions," penned by Emily Gerard. She mentions the Transylvanian peasantry's belief in nosferatu, a night-haunting, blood-drinking humanlike creature that she equated with a vampire.

Gerard, in turn, took much of her story from an 1866 work by the Austrian folklorist Wilhelm Schmidt. Both Schmidt and Gerard noted that the creatures could be dead or living. They might be compelled to consume blood through a curse, or as part of a magic ritual, or through a pact with the devil. Notably, a nosferatu could transform into other creatures, including a wolf, snake, rat, or bat. A nosferatu could be dispatched by driving a stake through their heart, shooting into their coffin, or beheading or burning them.



## Zombies

The farther back one goes into historical sources, the more the idea of a vampire blends together with other nightmarish entities. In 1751, French scholar Antoine Augustin Calmet published a work now available as the *Treatise on the Apparitions of Spirits and on Vampires or Revenants of Hungary, Moravia, et al.* Here, the word *revenant* refers to someone who has returned from the dead. Hungary, it should be noted, then included Transylvania.

Calmet's revenants are described as a class of reanimated corpses, reminiscent of the modern concept of zombies. However, Calmet's revenants weren't moaning for brains. Rather, they were obnoxious, reanimated, decomposing corpses who roamed around causing trouble and spreading disease.

By Calmet's reckoning, these revenants were so common as to represent a general nuisance. The basic explanation was that a bad person in life remains one in death. Since assignment to hell wouldn't happen until judgment day, they were free in the interim to do what mischief they could.

Scandinavia had its own revenants in the form of beings known as the draugr, which were usually the reanimated guardians of ancient tombs and treasure. Also relevant here is the eastern European Jewish myth of the dybbuk, a wandering, malevolent spirit of an evil person.

## Modern Conceptions

The notion of vampires and werewolves received a boost during the 1920s and 1930s through the literary efforts of Montague Summers, who became an occult investigator. He followed Calmet's footsteps in such books as *The Werewolf* and *The Vampire*, combing through old records and supposed eyewitness accounts to create a disquietingly realistic picture of these vile entities.

Our modern conception of a zombie was created by George Romero's 1968 low-budget horror flick *Night of the Living Dead*, though the movie itself never uses the term *zombie*. The notion of a zombie apocalypse—in which the ravenous dead rise to devour the living—has since become a staple of American popular culture.

The term *zombie* originated in Haiti among enslaved West Africans. The most likely theory is that the name derived from the Kongo language and originally meant something like “body without soul.” It gained currency in popular culture with the 1929 publication of American occultist Willie Seabrook’s account of his travels in Haiti, titled *The Magic Island*.

## Worldwide Conceptions

So far, this chapter has stuck to Western examples, but it’s fair to say that shape-shifting and revenants are largely universal. While werewolves are essentially a European phenomenon, other legendary creatures include were-tigers, were-panthers, were-bears, and even were-sharks.

Chinese mythology doesn’t feature a blood-drinking vampire, but it does have a creature termed the *jiangshi*, or “hopping vampire,” that drains its victims’ life energy, or qi. It apparently hops about because—as a desiccated corpse—it’s too stiff to do anything else.



### THE PENANGGALAN

Indonesia and Southeast Asia are home to the penanggalan, a curious female vampire who haunts the nighttime forest as a floating head trailing a string of guts, only to return to life as a normal woman by daylight.

There are also examples from Native American lore. For at least 15,000 years, America's original inhabitants were out of contact with the rest of humanity. Therefore, any common threads between the New World and Old World suggest beliefs and practices dating to the prehistoric beginnings of the human race.

One of the most intriguing American revenant-type beings is the wendigo, a legendary monster among the Algonquin of Canada and the United States. The wendigo is an evil spirit that possesses a living person, often one who has been forced into cannibalism or committed murder. The afflicted person is gripped by an insatiable lust for human flesh and starts to kill and feast on others, often family members.

But the wendigo's hunger can never be satisfied. According to most stories, it grows as it eats, so its belly is never full. Over time, the wendigo becomes a giant, gaunt, skeletal monstrosity that reeks of decay and is ever on the prowl for more food.



## THE WENDIGO



The Navajo of the American Southwest originated the idea of the skinwalker. A skinwalker is a black magic–practicing witch, sorcerer, or shaman who uses shape-shifting to accomplish their nefarious ends. The same shape-shifting tricks are also reputedly employed by the nagual sorcerers of Mexico; they supposedly prefer to transform into were-jaguars.

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Summers, Montague. *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin*. University Books, 1960.

### Questions

- 1 When and where was the Beast of Gévaudan supposedly active?
- 2 If the Beast of Gévaudan wasn't a werewolf, then what was it?



# Religious Faith and the Occult

Occult practices—including ritual magic, alchemy, astrology, and spirit communication—are viewed as techniques to access the greater reality. Religion itself is based on the same fundamental belief, and employs many of the same techniques, though they're usually given different names. This chapter looks at several such techniques, starting with the handling of serpents.

## Snake Handling

Certain Christian gatherings feature snake-handling pastors, who take their inspiration from the Gospels, specifically Mark 16:17–18. Those verses read,

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues.

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

These powers are signs that one has been blessed by the Holy Spirit—in other words, anointed by the power of the unseen world. The snake-handling pastor is another manifestation of the timeless shaman, witnessing his connection to the supernatural and inspiring his flock to do the same. This form of occultism might be religiously sanctioned, but it's occultism nonetheless.



The appearance of snake-handling in the United States is usually dated to 1910 and a single Tennessee church led by the preacher George Hensley, who—not incidentally—died from snakebite. But the same practices cropped up in Appalachia and other locales much earlier. Writer and folklore investigator Jim Brandon wonders if there might be a link between this American practice and the serpent-power cults that once existed—or still exist—in the British Isles. Serpents have been objects of occult symbolism and religious veneration for millennia. For instance, the ancient Sumerians had a snake god, as did the ancient Egyptians.

Turning back to Christianity, the most notable biblical snake is the serpent of Eden, who ended up—rightly or wrongly—being equated with the devil. But not all biblical serpents are bad. During the exodus from Egypt, God commanded Moses to hang the image of a brazen serpent on a pole so that that any Israelites who gazed upon it would be saved from death by snakebite. The brazen serpent granted magical protection. For a time, the brazen serpent became an object of veneration among Israelites despite the prohibition of graven images.



## CATHOLIC MASS

Mass is the central ritual of Catholicism, and it's quite occult. Before the very eyes of the parishioners, the bread and wine of the Eucharist are transformed into the flesh and blood of a living god. They are then devoured to attain divine grace. This transformation, or transubstantiation, is completely invisible—that is, occulted—to the naked eye. According to the church, it's also completely real.

## Encounters with Angels

Encounters with angels show up frequently in religious history and occult lore. Angels came in many varieties, often terrifying in appearance. Like djinn, fairies, and demons, angels appear however they wish. That's why telling one from the other is tricky. After all, Satan and all his sub-devils are angels.

Elizabethan occultist John Dee claimed he contacted angels to learn their language, only to have the angels insist that he swap wives with his assistant, Edward Kelley. In 15th-century France, someone else claimed to have communed with an angel: Joan of Arc, best known as France's national saint, though she was burned at the stake as a supposed witch.

During her 1431 trial, inquisitors quizzed Joan about a large beech tree that grew near her home village of Domrémy. Near it was a spring reputed to have healing properties. Small offerings were left under the branches, which were often adorned with garlands of flowers. Joan remembered her grandmother saying she'd seen fairies near the tree, though Joan said she'd seen none herself. She also denied dancing under the beech, though she admitted that young people often did.

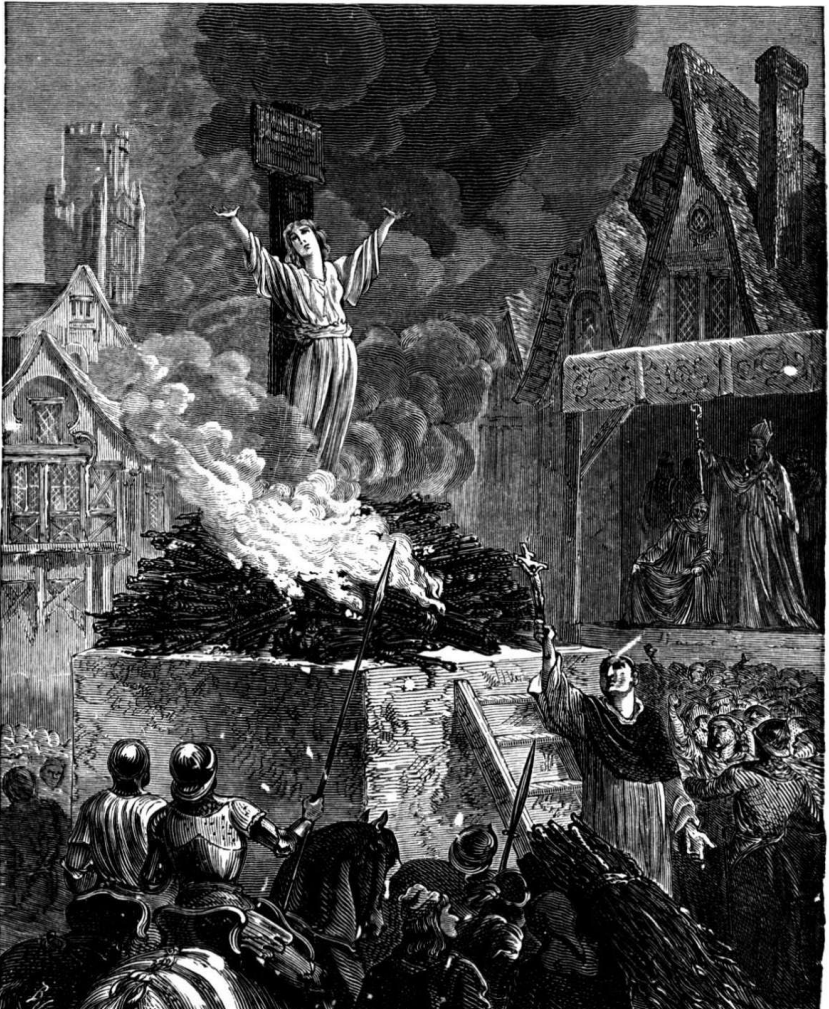
Joan's inquisitors were sniffing after pagan rites and witchery, which they regarded as evidence of diabolical influence. The church had declared the veneration of trees, fountains, or stones a sacrilege.

It was near this very tree that Joan heard voices and saw visions. It began in the summer of her 13th year. She said a man's voice spoke, and "there was a great light all about." The voice—said to be the archangel Michael—instructed her to expect visitations from Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret. They would tell her what to do, and she was to follow their commands without question.

According to Joan, the saints appeared on a regular basis for the next four years, preparing her for what was to come. When she turned 17, Joan said Michael assigned her a great mission: free France from the boot of the English and restore its divinely ordained monarchy. The voices directed her, like legendary King Arthur, to a special sword hidden behind a church altar.

For the next few years, the armor-clad Joan rallied the French army and turned the tide of the war. With her mission accomplished, Joan fell into the hands of her enemies and was seemingly abandoned to her fate. An alternative reading is that she was offered up as a sacrifice to seal the deal.

Joan's experience was enmeshed in occult symbolism and tradition. It is an example of an oft-repeated pattern: After an initial—usually frightening—visitation, the chosen human is given a mission and accomplishes it against great odds, usually dying soon after.



## KING SOLOMON

No discussion of biblical occultism would be complete without mentioning the famous King Solomon, who reputedly gained command over all the djinn—the Middle Eastern amalgams of demons and fairies. Later occultists regarded Solomon as one of the great magicians of history. And his authorship was attributed to two of the most important grimoires, or spell books: the *Key of Solomon* and *Lesser Key of Solomon*.

### Joseph Smith Jr.

Another example comes from upstate New York in the early 19th century. Joseph Smith Jr. was the founder and prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In 1820, when he was 14 years old, Smith and his family were well known for their involvement in folk magic.

Joseph Smith's family was most interested in seeking treasure. Buried treasure was often said to be protected by a guardian spirit. But young Joseph was interested in more than money.

In 1823, he claimed his first visitation from the angel Moroni. Moroni reportedly revealed the existence of the fabulous golden plates, which would be critical to the Mormon religion, though he didn't let Smith have them for another four years. Eventually, to decipher the golden plates—and turn them into the Book of Mormon—Smith needed one more occult accoutrement: the seer stones, which have a long history in magical practice.

Smith said that upon peering into them, “time, place, and distance were annihilated.” This echoes the belief that the occult world is not governed by the same laws of time and space that define our own.

One of Joseph's most prized possessions was a metal amulet called a Jupiter talisman. It was designed to ensure protection and material success. The coin-shaped amulet incorporated elements of astrology, numerology, and even ritual magic. On one side were the astrological and magical seals for Jupiter, along with the Latin phrase *Confirmo o Deus Potentissimus*, meaning “Make Secure, oh God, Most Powerful.”

The talisman's opposite side featured a magical square containing 16 smaller squares, each with a Hebrew letter. These letters corresponded to numbers that added up to 16 in any row and 136 in total, which is the mystical number of Jupiter. It was a potent amulet but with a critical flaw: One Hebrew word was misspelled. That, according to some occultists, is why the talisman failed to save Smith from being murdered in 1844, at age 38.

## Visitors in Portugal

A final example of the occult intertwining with religion, specifically Catholicism, comes from 20th-century Portugal. In the spring of 1916, nine-year-old Lucia dos Santos and her younger cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto were tending sheep near the provincial town of Fátima. A wind suddenly came up.

According to the children, they were next approached by a strange young man. They described him as unearthly beautiful, with a glowing, translucent appearance. Announcing himself as the angel of peace, the children said he taught them a prayer and urged them to repeat it. Before vanishing, he promised: "The hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications."

The angel visited them multiple times more. Eventually, on May 13, 1917, they received a new visitor: the Virgin Mary, who became a new repeat visitor. On July 13, the children said she materialized to entrust them with three secrets. The first two of these would be revealed in 1941.

One was a vision of sinners burning in hell. The second promised that World War I—which was still raging in 1917—would end, but an even more destructive conflict would follow if men continued to offend God, especially if Russia was not stopped from spreading false doctrines and converted. Some see this as a prediction of the rise of communism and World War II. Mary reputedly demanded that the third secret be kept longer. It was.



On Mary's final appearance, on October 13, 1917, she's credited with arranging a dazzling display for a crowd of spectators estimated at 30,000 to 70,000. First, the sky was reportedly illuminated by brilliant colored lights. Then, the sun appeared to perform strange movements, swooping down toward earth and then away again.

Some spectators later claimed they saw all of this, others only part, and still others nothing at all. The vision of Our Lady of Fátima aroused intense faith in some and deep skepticism in others.

The church approached such matters seriously. Hundreds of so-called Marian apparitions have been attested to. The Vatican has placed its seal of approval on a small number of them. For the Fátima apparition, that came in 1946. In the meantime, Francisco and Jacinta died during the flu epidemic of the early 1900s. Lucia, the sole survivor of the trio, entered a convent and became a nun, living until 2005.

Obedying Mary's instructions, she guarded the third secret until 1944, when her bishop insisted that she write it down. The information was forwarded to Rome but would not be made public until 2000. It appeared to be a highly abstract prediction of the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981, which was 64 years after Mary's first appearance.

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## Questions

- 1 How can you differentiate a religious experience from a mystical experience?
- 2 Is snake-handling purely inspired by the Bible, or are there other factors involved?

# Mysterious Places

**T**his chapter focuses on occult places. It visits places with reputations as centers of supernatural activity or occult power. The underlying and unifying basis of magic is about putting energy into something—a thought, an object, or a person—or taking energy out. The same is true about occult places.



## STONEHENGE

Stonehenge is a site that dates back at least 5,000 years. Today, it's generally accepted that this famous landmark was a kind of observatory or giant calendar keyed to the summer solstice. As such, it was used to regulate planting and other rituals.

In the Middle Ages, the construction of Stonehenge was attributed to the legendary sorcerer Merlin. In more modern times, it has become a pilgrimage site for self-proclaimed druids and neo-pagans as well as tourists.

### Ever Under Construction

One notably mysterious home belonged to Sarah Winchester, who was born as Sarah Pardee in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1839. In 1862, she married William Winchester, the heir to the Winchester firearms company. In 1866, Sarah gave birth to their only child, a daughter, Annie. The infant died weeks later from a rare condition that made her slowly starve to death. In 1881, Sarah's 43-year-old husband, William, succumbed to tuberculosis. Sarah's mother and father-in-law died around the same time. It's not hard to see how she might have developed a morbid fear of death or an obsession with contacting her loved ones on the other side.

Sarah inherited a lump fortune of \$20 million plus a 50% stake in the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. At this point, she was one of the richest women in the world. In the wake of her husband's passing, Sarah was said to have consulted a well-known Boston medium, Adam Coons. The medium went into a trance and gave a warning: Vengeful spirits of men killed by Winchester guns were on their way to haunt Sarah.

These same spirits, Coons warned, were behind the untimely demises of her daughter and spouse and would have their way with her unless she took evasive action. In 1884, Sarah left New England, moving cross-country to California, where she built a house to contain and control these angry ghosts.

In 1884, she purchased a modest two-story, eight-room ranch house called Llaneda Villa on the western outskirts of San Jose and immediately commenced renovations. The catch was that the house could never be finished. So long as it remained a work in progress, the spirits would never firmly attach themselves to it—or her. And that, supposedly, is what explains 38 years of nonstop construction and deconstruction, plus the 160 rooms, 47 fireplaces, 10,000 windows, 2,000 doors, and 13 blind staircases that the house would contain at one point or another.

While this story is interesting, one problem with the tale is that there's no proof Winchester ever met the medium Coons. Sarah Winchester was a very private person. The only one who truly understood her actions was her.

## LLANEDA VILLA



## Lotusland

In Santa Barbara's star-studded enclave of Montecito, another occult-infused estate beckons. It's called Lotusland. Its creator, Ganna Walska, was born in 1887 as Hanna Puacz. She marketed herself as an opera singer. She also had the gift of stunning beauty, which attracted a string of rich husbands who left her a wealthy woman. One of these was the Chicago industrialist Harold McCormick, who spent a small fortune promoting her singing career. Walska's other passion was mystical enlightenment.

In 1942, Walska married her sixth and last husband Theos Bernard, who was 20 years her junior and a proclaimed expert in Tantric yoga. Billing himself as the White Lama, Bernard sold Walska on the notion of buying 32 acres in the Montecito foothills and turning it into a refuge for Tibetan monks. The monks never materialized, and Walska left Bernard. But she kept the estate, renaming it Lotusland. Today, its lush gardens are open to visitors.

In the decades leading to her death in 1984, Lotusland acquired a reputation as a gathering place for occult groups and alternative life forms. Most of these occult gatherings seem to have taken place without Walska's permission, as sneaking onto the property became a pastime for curious thrill-seekers.

## Strange Places in Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, two locales that stand out as magnets for strangeness are Griffith Park and the eastern edge of the Simi Valley, particularly the area around Santa Susana Pass. Griffith Park comprises more than 4,000 acres of rugged, brush-covered hills. It's a popular recreation area containing an observatory, zoo, rail museum, man-made caves, and the iconic Hollywood sign. But it's also reputed to be under the shadow of a curse dating to its Spanish land-grant origins, and it has more than its share of ghost stories.

One of the more notable stories revolves around the deaths of an amorous couple whose lovemaking one day in 1976 was cut short by a huge tree limb that crushed them on a picnic table. More disquieting is Griffith Park's record of murders and disappearances.

The Santa Susana Pass is best known for the former Spahn movie ranch, where Charles Manson and his family spent time in the late 1960s. But the locale had been attracting cults for decades. It was there in 1948 that a discharged army veteran named Francis Pencovic proclaimed himself Christ and the reincarnation of just about every holy man imaginable. He formed a religion dubbed the Fountain of the World and changed his name to Krishna Venta. His empire ended in 1958 when two disgruntled followers blew up themselves and their guru.

## THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA

Arguably the most mythologized place on the planet is the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. It was built 4,000 to 5,000 years ago as a tomb for Pharaoh Khufu. That alone makes it a place of occult significance because it was designed to hold and protect the pharaoh's divine remains, and this protection was multiplied by the many spells cast over it.



## Glastonbury

Britain has quite a few places of mystery, Stonehenge among them. Another example is the charming Somerset town of Glastonbury. Its claim to occult fame involves the Holy Grail—specifically, the tale that Jesus’s great-uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, carried the cup of holy blood all the way to Roman Britain and then hid it near the base of Glastonbury Tor, a prominent conical hill. Among other things, the Glastonbury Tor is reputed to guard an entrance to the underworld, and it’s the source of a natural spring, Chalice Well. As the story goes, while resting there, Joseph stuck his thorn-wood staff into the ground, and it miraculously took root and began to grow.

An unusual oriental thornbush did indeed once flourish there. It became a religious pilgrimage site until the 17th century, when a Puritan soldier cut it down to root out idolatry. A new one was later replanted, and the Holy Grail legend remains a big part of Glastonbury’s history.

## Sites in France

Mysterious places populate France as well. In the middle of the Seine River in Paris sits the Île de la Cité. At the far western tip is a small park, the Square du Vert Galant. In this spot in 1314, Grand Master Jacques de Molay and other leaders of the Knights Templar were burned at the stake.

From that, many legends arose. One argues that these executions imbued the spot with the dark energies of anger and revenge, energies that others might try to tap for occult purposes. Jacques de Molay’s execution site became a gathering place for modern occultists seeking to do just that.

Also in France, to the far south, is the mountain village of Rennes-le-Château. Today, it’s often regarded as the most occult-laced spot in France. The roots of Rennes-le-Château’s mysteriousness rest in the fact that it sits amid Cathar country, the last refuge of a heretical sect exterminated in a crusade instigated by the Catholic church.

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## Questions

- 1 If warding off evil spirits wasn't the goal of Sarah Winchester's ongoing construction project, then what was?
- 2 Why do you think the Santa Susana Pass area seems to attract so many cults?



# Crime and the Occult

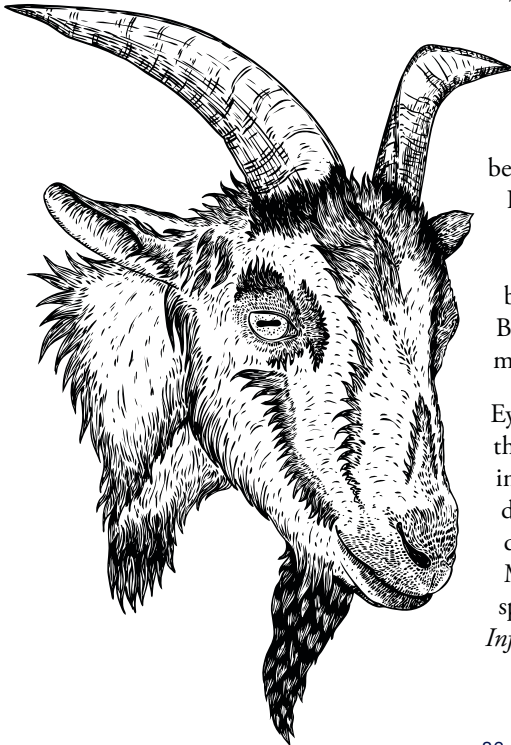
**T**his chapter focuses on occult crime, meaning any criminal act or enterprise in which there's an occult motive or influence. It uses examples to illustrate that the symbiosis between occultism and crime is both time-honored and universal.

## Macario Timon

One morning in Oakland, California, homicide inspector Tom Wood found the body of Macario Timon, his throat cut from ear to ear. The murder weapon—a straight razor—lay nearby. The scene was a ramshackle house by some train tracks.

Timon was a goat-raising recluse to most of his neighbors. But a lot of people came and went from his place at night. That's because Timon was also a bootlegger who peddled cheap gin and wine. The place had been ransacked, and the pockets on Timon's clothing turned out.

However, the money taken from Timon's clothes was left next to his body. More cash sat in plain view along with other valuables. That raised a question: If this was not a robbery, why was Timon killed?



Timon had a secret: He was a practitioner of the occult and a devoted follower of Lucifer.

Timon was a native of Spain who'd lived in Cuba and Hawaii before showing up in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to goats and bootlegging, Timon dabbled in prospecting and had recently boasted of making a fabulous find. But his name wasn't listed on any mining claim in the state.

Eyebrows rose when police examined the contents of his home. These included a small library of books dealing with black magic, plus strange drawings and mysterious charms.

Most notable was a grimoire, or spell book: *El libro infernal*, or *The Infernal Book*.

It described how to summon demonic entities and how to make a pact with Lucifer, or more precisely, Lucifuge Rofocale, the prime minister of hell. That's exactly what Timon did. A letter—written in blood and bearing his signature—beseeched “Most Powerful Lucifer” for knowledge that would help Timon against his enemies.

Investigators discovered he'd visited a medium who recalled him talking about summoning spirits. Police also found mention of an amulet, and they discovered correspondence in which Timon described a magical stone, or *pedra imán*, that he'd recently obtained and which couldn't be found.

Police began to suspect that the magical stone was what Timon's killer or killers were after. Timon's lawyer, James Galliano, added more to the story. Galliano said his client couldn't have written the Lucifer pact because he was illiterate. The attorney insisted that a diabolical cult had lured Timon into its clutches and then murdered him as retribution or sacrifice.

The media seized on the cult angle and spread the story. The cult allegedly behind Timon's killing was identified as the redundant-sounding Satanic Mystic Order of Lucifer. However, there wasn't any evidence that such a group existed. The police, while skeptical of the cult angle, couldn't rule it out because they couldn't come up with anything better. Eventually, Macario Timon was ruled to have died “at the hands of a person or persons unknown.”

## Gilles de Rais

In 15th-century France, there occurred a unique case centered on a French nobleman named Gilles de Montmorency-Laval, better known as Gilles de Rais. He was a member of the warrior elite and a devoted comrade to the vision-seeing peasant heroine Joan of Arc. In the last chapter of France's Hundred Years' War with England, the two fought together to achieve a tide-turning victory at the Siege of Orleans in 1429.

Gilles became marshal of France and one of the richest men in the realm. Two years later, Joan—while destined for martyrdom and sainthood—was captured by the enemy and burned at the stake as a witch. Gilles, despite his reputation for derring-do and immense wealth, made no effort to rescue or ransom her, and he would die condemned as a child killer and sorcerer.

Leading up to this ignominious end, Gilles de Rais earned a reputation as an epic spendthrift. Eventually, to keep the ball rolling, Gilles started selling off land. A few years later, he was down to his last few castles when the king intervened to forbid further squandering of assets.

Gilles presumably became desperate, and desperate people do desperate things. This coincided with the appearance of an Italian priest named François Prelati. Prelati, in addition to being a man of the cloth, was an alchemist and brought with him a magical book, or grimoire. It contained spells for summoning demons who could manifest wealth in return for suitable sacrifices.

Prelati is said to have invoked a demon named Barron, but without much result. Barron supposedly wasn't satisfied with the animals Prelati offered. The demon wanted Gilles's soul, but the nobleman refused a formal pact.

Gilles was mortally afraid of jeopardizing his immortal soul despite his willingness to commerce with devils. Barron reputedly insisted on the soul of a child, preferably a young boy, and then another, and another, and another. Gilles and his band of accomplices are said to have supplied them. Just how many is another uncertainty; 140 names were entered at Gilles's trial. Other estimates range from 60 to 600 or more. The victims underwent a brutal ritual.

Barron seems never to have followed through on furnishing the promised wealth. Regardless, Gilles and his conjurers kept at it for years. They might have gone on indefinitely, but Gilles began ransacking other nobles' castles and assaulting meddling priests. In May 1440, that drew the attention of the powerful bishop of Nantes, who investigated. Family after family came forward to complain of children missing, along with rumors of Gilles's dabbling in sorcery. That September, an order went out for the arrest of Gilles and eight associates, including the conjuring priest Prelati. Prelati saved his skin by talking about the crimes, sealing Gilles's fate.

Gilles initially denied everything. But as the evidence mounted, he caved and confessed to the killings, complete with sickening details. He even expressed remorse for the deeds. Eventually, he was hanged with two accomplices on October 26, 1440.

## EXECUTION OF GILLES DE RAIS



## Occultism and Crime in India

Occultism arguably exerts its greatest influence on organized crime. In early 19th-century India, British authorities discovered the existence of a highly organized criminal society that practiced mass murder for profit and as a form of religious devotion. Called Thuggee or Phansigar, the cult had been around for centuries and killed thousands of people every year. These individuals were recruited on a hereditary basis and sworn to secrecy, and communicated using special signs and passwords.

They found unification and motivation in their devotion to the Hindu goddess known as Kali or Bhowanee. She was both the goddess of destruction and a protector against evil.

The typical Thuggee modus operandi was for members to join groups of travelers and wait for the party to camp during the night at some isolated spot. Once the unwary travelers went to sleep, the Thuggee members rose and silently strangled them. On other occasions, they might use daggers or poison. Once the victims were disposed of, their valuables were looted and the bodies carefully buried. The victims were offered as sacrifices to Kali.

KALI



## Occultism and the Mafia

The link between occultism and crime is also apparent in the context of the Mafia and mob initiation rituals. The ceremony has many variations, but all are replete with occult symbolism and significance.

In a typical initiation, the aspiring mafioso or so-called made man is led to a table—a makeshift altar—adorned with sacred objects, often a gun and a knife, symbolizing the deadly tools of the criminal trade. A picture of a skull might also be present, but usually it's a small paper portrait of a saint. A senior member pricks the candidate's finger, sometimes his lip, and drops of blood are allowed to fall on the picture.

The saint is then set on fire, and, as the candidate passes the burning image from hand to hand, he swears his oath of loyalty and silence. The oath almost always contains a version of the phrase, “As burns this saint, so burns my soul if I betray my oath.” Afterward, one or more senior members kisses the new brother on both cheeks, and the pact is made. In effect, the mafioso doesn't sell his soul to the devil but to the brotherhood.

## Adolfo Constanzo

Protection is what criminals most often seek from the occult. There's no better example of this than the modern phenomenon of narco-occultism. Take the case of the so-called Godfather of Matamoros, Adolfo Constanzo.

He was a Cuban American born in Miami, though most of his crimes were committed in Mexico. He was introduced to the occult and drug dealing by his mother, who'd studied Voodoo in Haiti and was well versed in the Palo Mayombe traditions of her native Cuba. Palo Mayombe is a syncretic system of magic that mixes African deities, witchcraft, and spiritualism, along with a gloss of Roman Catholicism. A practitioner is a palero or palera. The centerpiece of the palero's magic is the nganga or prenda, a metal cauldron into which go various charms and objects, including the bones and body parts of animals and humans.

Like the occult generally, Palo Mayombe is neither good nor evil. It's simply a means to accomplish a particular end. As always, the good or bad is in the intent of the practitioner. Adolfo Constanzo's intentions definitely gravitated to the negative.

As a teenager, he apprenticed himself to a Miami palero who taught him the ins and outs of animal sacrifice. Constanzo also learned how to make charms and cast protective spells. In the 1980s, he moved to Mexico City, where he combined his version of Palo Mayombe with Aztec mysticism to offer greater appeal to the locals.

He built a small cult and started peddling lucky charms and protective spells. Drug dealers heard about this and—given the constant threats posed by law enforcement and rival cartels—hired him to cast spells for them.

Constanzo and his accomplices started robbing graves to stock their cauldrons, and the captive ghosts were set to work. But he needed living sacrifices to energize the process. For their purposes, nothing topped a human sacrifice.

The official count of the cult's victims was 16, but it might have been twice as many. As Constanzo's fame grew, so did his ego and ambitions. He wanted in on the drug trade, and when one cartel tried to block him, seven of its members turned up dead and suspiciously missing body parts. Constanzo got his way.

In 1988, he and his followers moved to a desert ranch near Matamoros, along the US border, so that he could better oversee drug shipments. Meanwhile, the sacrifices continued for his allies' protection—and his own. After a series of subsequent events, in 1989, law enforcement came after Constanzo. To avoid capture, Constanzo ordered one of his minions to shoot him. He did, ending Constanzo's life.

## Reading

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## Questions

- 1 Who do you think killed Macario Timon, and why?
- 2 Why do some organized crime figures turn to occult practices?



## UFOs and the Occult

**T**his chapter focuses on unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and how they intertwine with the occult. The two are inextricably bound up with one another. Magic seems to appear in the most unlikely places, and UFOs are no exception.

## The Golden Age of Flying Saucers

On a hot August night in 1952, George Hunt Williamson and his wife Betty cleared away the dinner they'd enjoyed with another couple at their home in Prescott, Arizona. Next, George produced a homemade Ouija board, with a shot glass serving as the board's pointer. George and his friend, Alfred Bailey, moved the glass around the board while Betty Williamson took notes. They were trying to contact extraterrestrials.

Overall, Williamson displayed a remarkable talent for channeling many different aliens from many different planets in many different voices. He and Bailey would eventually coauthor a book about their experience, *The Saucers Speak*, which remains a classic of UFO lore.

Alfred Bailey eventually faded from the scene, but George Hunt Williamson went on to become a major figure in the so-called contactee movement, i.e., those who believe they've made personal contact with extraterrestrial beings. Indeed, Williamson became one of the four Georges of the golden age of flying saucers, along with George Adamski, George King, and George Van Tassel. These men shared an immersion in occult beliefs and practices.

George Adamski was arguably the most famous of the early contactees. He mostly made his living as a purveyor of mysticism. In the 1930s, he founded the Royal Order of Tibet in southern California. It promised to dispense Tibetan wisdom as channeled by Adamski from superhuman lamas somewhere in the Himalayas. When that well ran dry, Adamski turned to the new craze of flying saucers.

On November 20, 1952, Williamson, Bailey, and their wives joined Adamski on a saucer-hunting expedition in California's Mojave Desert. This allegedly led to Adamski's famous face-to-face encounter with a Venusian named Orthon.

"Space Intelligences" like Orthon didn't offer any practical pointers for space travel or a cure for cancer. Instead, they lectured about humanity's desperate need for spiritual enlightenment and the cataclysmic perils of nuclear energy. The rest of the galaxy, it seems, was very worried about us.

Along the same lines, in May 1954, London cabbie George King said he was driving along when a voice popped into his head proclaiming, “Prepare yourself! You are to become the voice of the Interplanetary Parliament!” King duly formed the Aetherius Society, which is still around.

Another of the Georges, George Van Tassel, quit his job in 1947 and moved his family to an isolated spot in the Mojave Desert, about 50 miles north of Palm Springs. Called Giant Rock, the spot boasted a massive granite boulder seven stories tall, plus a small airfield and café that Van Tassel ran.

In 1952, Van Tassel started getting telepathic messages from space beings. The most notable was named Ashtar, later a favorite of other occultist contactees. Van Tassel produced a book about his experiences titled *I Rode a Flying Saucer*. But his biggest contribution to the emerging field of ufology was organizing the first Interplanetary Spacecraft Convention in 1953. It became an annual event. Adamski and Williamson were regular attendees.

## Earlier Encounters

UFO researcher Jacques Vallee makes an excellent case that modern alien encounters—including alleged abductions—strongly resemble old tales of fairies, djinn, and demons. It raises the unsettling possibility that we might be dealing with beings capable of assuming many different faces in pursuit of some hidden—that is, occult—agenda.

A notable earlier incident took place in Utah during World War I. In the spring of 1917, Salt Lake City newspapers ran reports of “mystery lights” and strange airships. Witnesses were mostly respectable folk, including a county sheriff. Some local men popped up to claim that they were the builders and operators of the craft.

The United States had just entered World War I, so there was concern that these nocturnal antics could be part of a German plot. Leon Bone, the Bureau of Investigation’s local agent, decided to investigate the matter. He looked up the men and found them more than willing to talk. Their leader was a local Freemason named John Van Valkenburg, who proceeded to spin Bone an incredible tale.

It began out in the Nevada desert, where Van Valkenburg claimed that he had encountered a being called the Adept, among other names. According to Van Valkenburg, the Adept lived in a giant airship in stationary orbit high above Earth.

The being gave him a small, spinning disk device, which Van Valkenburg and his friends used to power the craft that they used to travel to the mothership and travel around at night. Van Valkenburg fantastically claimed that the craft could travel at 1,000 miles per hour to any altitude, without need of fuel.

On a more occult note, Van Valkenburg claimed that the Adept communicated with him telepathically and could assume the forms of friends and family, alive or dead. The Adept also had an agenda. He had come to cure humanity of its evil ways and usher in universal brotherhood.

Bone found Van Valkenburg's story utterly unbelievable, but he was also intrigued. Like many later contactees, Van Valkenburg seemed unshakable in his conviction. Bone decided to join the cult in hope of finding out what really was going on. He was subjected to a masonic-style initiation. Bone discovered that the whole business was somehow mixed up with the esoteric fringes of Mormonism.

Unfortunately, Bone never solved the mystery. Concerns arose that he'd become too close to the cult and lost objectivity. In early 1918, another FBI investigator, Robert Whitson, took over the case and prosecuted Van Valkenburg and his comrades as suspected spies. When that didn't pan out, Whitson had Van Valkenburg and his key lieutenant declared "selectively insane" and packed off to the state asylum.

They didn't stay long. But whether they got out by recanting their improbable story or just agreeing to be quiet about it is another unknown. Regardless, the story is important because it sounds almost exactly like something that might have come out of the mouth of a contactee 40 years later. It also argues that the experiences of Adamski, Van Tassel, and others can't be wholly dismissed as confabulations based on science fiction, movies, and Cold War paranoia.

**FROM OUT OF SPACE....  
A WARNING AND AN ULTIMATUM!**

**THE  
DAY  
THE  
EARTH  
STOOD  
STILL**



WITH

**MICHAEL RENNIE · PATRICIA NEAL · HUGH MARLOWE**

SAM JAFFE · BILLY GRAY · FRANCES BAVIER · LOCK MARTIN

PRODUCED BY JULIAN BLAUSTEIN · DIRECTED BY ROBERT WISE · SCREEN PLAY BY EDMUND H. NORTH

20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY-FOX

## Men in Black

Perhaps the spookiest element of the emerging UFO mythos was the sinister men in black, or MIB. The concept got its start with the strange case of Albert Bender of Connecticut. Bender made a big splash on the UFO scene in 1952 when he founded the International Flying Saucer Bureau, a research group that boasted 1,500 members. The following year, he sensationally announced that he'd solved the mystery of flying saucers and would soon reveal all.

Instead, the 32-year-old UFO researcher would even more sensationally claim that his revelation had been quashed “by order of a higher source.” He shut down his research operation and stepped away from flying saucers.

Bender explained that he'd been approached by “three men in black suits” who told him that while he was right about the nature of UFOs, he couldn't say anything—or else. Some suspected he conjured up the tale to extricate himself from the UFO swamp. But there was more to Albert Bender. In addition to UFOs, he was fascinated by the occult. He kept a room of pictures and artifacts he dubbed his “chamber of horrors.” The occultist Allen Greenfield says it included an altar to practice ritual magic.

Bender's MIB story took off when a publisher named Gray Barker got ahold of the story and spun it into the best-selling book *They Knew Too Much about Flying Saucers*. From that point on, men in black—or something like them—became fixtures of UFO lore.

## Allen Greenfield and the UFOonauts

Allen Greenfield epitomizes the connection between occultism and UFOs. Greenfield has been an occultist for more than 60 years. In the early 1990s, he wrote a book titled *The Secret Cipher of the UFOonauts*, which leads back to Aleister Crowley. The book's basic premise is that UFOs are manifestations of powerful nonhuman entities named UFOonauts, who can appear as gods, angels, devils, or secret chiefs. Whether these beings are extraterrestrials or from some alternate dimension is unclear and doesn't truly matter. The UFOonauts are here and have always been.

Over the millennia, according to Greenfield, these UFOonauts maintained contact with a group of select humans who collectively constitute an informal illuminati. The illuminated humans communicate with the UFOonauts and among themselves through alchemy, secret societies, and—most importantly—a cipher.

Aleister Crowley, the story goes, received the cipher in 1904 when a UFOonaut named Aiwass embedded it in *The Book of the Law*. Crowley, however, didn't recognize it at the time. The cipher was only fully worked out in the 1970s and 1980s with the aid of computers. The cipher assigned numerical values to letters and the words they formed. Grossly oversimplified, it means that different words with the same value have occult connection or correspondence.

## Reading

Gorightly, Adam. *Saucers, Spooks and Kooks: UFO Disinformation in the Age of Aquarius*. Daily Grail Publishing, 2021.

## Questions

- 1 Do you think the idea of the men in black has some basis in reality?
- 2 What are some ways occultism and extraterrestrial encounters overlap?





## The Occult Russian Revolution

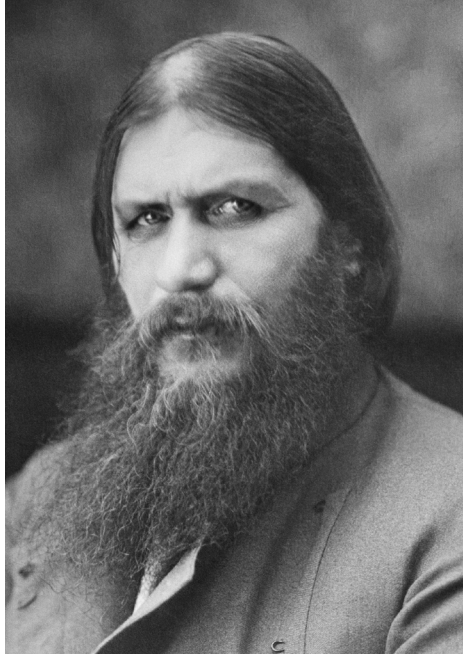
**T**his chapter focuses on the influence of the occult in revolutionary Russia. In the years leading up to Russia's revolutionary era, occultism blossomed, showing itself through figures such as Grigory Yefimovich Rasputin and others.

## December 1916

In the predawn hours of December 17, 1916, a car crept slowly onto the icy Petrovsky Bridge in Petrograd, the capital city of imperial Russia. Three men pulled a heavy bundle from the vehicle and dragged it to the side of the overpass. The bundle disappeared into the inky waters of the Little Nevka river.

Two days later, a river policeman spied the corpse frozen in the ice about 70 yards downstream. Examination identified it as the remains of Rasputin—the most infamous man in Russia. To the empress Alexandra, he had been a beloved friend and adviser.

To many others, he was a schemer. The men who killed him—professed monarchists and patriots—saw Rasputin as an agent of dark forces working to destroy the tsar and Russia. To hear them tell it, they didn't kill a man but a devil.



**RASPUTIN**

## Occult Currents

In Russia in the early 1900s, esoteric masonic lodges were widespread. Interest in things like spiritualism, theosophy, and Rosicrucianism abounded in the upper classes. And out in the vast countryside, the old beliefs in witchcraft, faith healers, and fortune-tellers maintained their grip. Rasputin would form a bridge between these two currents of occultism. Some saw this metaphysical mania as a sign of fresh, even revolutionary, thinking.

Others sensed something sinister in the wind. Sergei Witte, the tsar's minister of finance, was worried about the rising tide of occultism. Great and terrible events, he claimed, were heralded by outbursts of such “bizarre mysticism.”

The tendrils of occultism reached right into the imperial family. One of the tsar's kinsmen, Grand Duke Alexander Mihailovich, was an enthusiastic and high-ranking Freemason, theosophist, and Rosicrucian.

The two biggest purveyors of mysticism in court circles were the Montenegrin princesses Anastasia and Militza, each of whom married Romanov grand dukes. The duo promoted a steady stream of mystics and mediums. They would introduce the empress to a string of spiritual advisers, ending with Rasputin.

Before him came two Frenchmen, starting with Nizier Anthelme Philippe. Eventually, Gérard Encausse replaced Philippe and adopted the mystical name Papus. Back in France, Papus had been a cofounder of the Martinist Order, an occult brotherhood.

## **Papus's Work**

Papus's influence at the imperial court came to a head in 1905. That year, a disastrous war with Japan ignited Russia's first wave of revolutionary upheaval. By the fall, Russia's ruler Nicholas II seemed on the verge of losing the throne. With Alexandra's help, Papus—who claimed to be a trance medium—persuaded the worried tsar to sit down for a séance in which Papus purported to channel the spirit of Tsar Alexander III, Nicholas II's father.

According to the most common version of events, Alexander III's ghost warned that while the present revolutionary wave would recede, it would rise again to threaten Nicholas and his family. Papus generously offered to cast a spell over the Romanovs to protect them from this fate, a spell he promised would last so long as Papus lived.

The revolution's momentum abruptly collapsed, and Nicholas granted a slate of reforms that appeared to restore his regime's stability. Interestingly, those reforms legalized Martinist lodges Papus was busily creating.

This raises the question of whether Papus was trying to shore up Nicholas or secretly undermine him. The answer may be both. There was yet another side to Papus: secret agent of the French government. Russia was France's indispensable ally against Germany. Papus and his fellow Martinists were passionately devoted to this Franco-Russian entente.

Russia, they believed, was destined to play a role in the establishment of a so-called new world order, and it was the duty of France's esoteric societies to assist this. French banks were also Russia's biggest lenders, fueling Russia's military and industrial expansion and greatly enhancing the bottom line of Parisian finance. Powerful interests in both France and Russia wanted to keep this gravy train rolling.

While willing to work with Nicholas in the short run, they were just as willing to cultivate alternatives over the long term. The occult machinations of Papus could have been one way to do that. However, Papus's reign as Romanov court sorcerer ended almost as soon as it began.

## Rasputin's Influence

Then, along came Grigory Rasputin. Nicholas met him for the first time on November 1, 1905. Though the tsar never seemed too taken with the holy man, Alexandra was, and Nicholas would deny her nothing.

It's long been supposed that Rasputin was influenced by a secretive religious sect called the Khlysty. This sect promoted enlightenment through transgression, a notion with deep roots in occult philosophy. Rasputin might or might not have joined the Khlysts, but he was undoubtedly aware of them and their practices. Salvation through sin was a part of his approach.

Some propose that Rasputin's real talent was hypnotism. He also possessed charisma, the magic of personality. As his fame spread, he made friends who introduced him to other friends.

That brought him to the attention of Anastasia and Militza, who steered him to Alexandra and Nicholas. Rasputin arrived on the scene at a critical time. Not only was the Romanov throne being rocked by revolution, but Alexandra had recently given birth to her youngest child and only son, Alexei.

Alexei inherited the genetic condition of hemophilia, which left him with the constant risk of death through his blood's inability to clot. Medical science offered no solution. It's not hard to see how a desperate mother would grasp at anything she could, especially one already inclined to the mystical.

Whether Rasputin channeled spiritual power, used hypnotic suggestion, or just waited for nature to take its course and claimed credit doesn't matter. Rasputin promised Alexandra that Alexei wouldn't die, and he didn't. That's all she needed.

## Rasputin's Enemies

If Rasputin made powerful friends, he also made enemies. The prime example was Father Iliodor, an ordained priest. Iliodor and Rasputin met around 1905, and Iliodor later took credit for introducing him to the imperial court. Iliodor also aspired to be the tsar's spiritual adviser.

Inevitably, he and Rasputin fell out. Iliodor lost Nicholas's favor and was booted from the church. He blamed Rasputin for his woes and began spreading the sordid tale that Rasputin and the empress Alexandra were lovers. In June 1914, a woman named Khioniya Guseva stabbed and seriously wounded Rasputin, claiming he was the Antichrist. Rasputin immediately blamed Iliodor.



**FATHER ILIODOR**

Fearing arrest, Iliodor fled abroad with the help of another prominent occult figure, Peter Badmaev. Badmaev and Iliodor secretly agreed to work together to bring down Rasputin.

Rasputin also faced danger from disillusioned followers or would-be followers. Among his bevy of devoted women was noblewoman Munya Golovina, who was close friends with another young aristocrat named Felix Yusupov. Eventually, Yusupov and Rasputin formed an odd friendship, or perhaps a mutual fascination, which later played a critical role in Rasputin's demise.

## Matters Escalate

Meanwhile, World War I erupted in the summer of 1914. True to Russia's alliance with France, which Papus had secretly worked to bolster, Russia went to war against Germany and Austria. Rasputin adamantly advised against this—and rightly so. The war proved a disaster for Russia and the death knell of the Romanov dynasty.

But Rasputin's vocal opposition would also be his undoing. In the fall of 1916, dangerous currents began to converge. Alexandra's previous guru, Papus, died in France on October 25. Now, presumably, his anti-revolution spell was no longer in effect. In the Russian parliament, Nicholas found himself under increasing attack for mismanaging the war. Rumors swirled that Rasputin and the empress were German agents working to force Russia into a separate peace with Berlin.

There had been some back-door peace negotiations, but there's no definite evidence that Rasputin was involved in them. Nevertheless, one group of plotters decided that the only way to save the monarchy was to remove Rasputin. Their ringleader was Felix Yusupov. At the same time, Rasputin's old enemy Father Iliodor was in New York spinning tales of Rasputin's intrigues with the Germans to British intelligence. The British listened.

According to Iliodor, the British agents gave an ominous warning: To prevent a separate peace, "Rasputin would be killed" even if it meant "the Romanovs would fall." On December 16, by the Russian calendar, Rasputin accepted Felix Yusupov's invitation to a late-night get-together. Again, his supposed

intuition failed him. Waiting at Yusupov's home was the band of plotters, along with one or two British intelligence officers. Their job was to extract any information Rasputin might have about German agents and intrigues, by any means necessary.

The evening ended with Rasputin being tortured and shot. The coup de grace was likely fired through the man's forehead by British intelligence officer Oswald Rayner. That brings the story full circle to the car on the bridge.

## The New Rasputin

There was a plan afoot to create a new Rasputin even before the original went to meet his maker. He was an American named Carl Louis Perin, a man who billed himself as a physician, a "mental scientist," and a skilled astrologer and palm reader. He and the real Rasputin eventually met through an ambitious politician named Alexander Protopopov.

Protopopov was the man who'd conducted the back-door peace talks with the Germans in 1916. He also entertained dreams of making himself Russia's dictator. Just a few days before Rasputin's murder, Perin, in Scandinavia, received a telegram from Protopopov commanding him to return to Russia at once. That raises suspicions that Protopopov knew what was about to occur.

The plan was to shoehorn Perin in as Nicholas and Alexandra's new spiritual adviser, then push a separate peace as the only means to save the monarchy. The British intercepted the telegrams and slyly blocked Perin's reentry to Russia.

Rasputin's brutal death was the opening shot in a cycle of chaos and murder that would engulf Russia for years to come. Just as Papius's séance predicted, the tide of revolution rose again and swept Nicholas from the throne in March 1917.

Eight months later, radical Bolsheviks seized power. And eight months after that, a Bolshevik firing squad sent the ex-tsar Nicholas II and his entire family to the great beyond.

## Reading

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## Questions

- 1 Did Rasputin get what was coming to him, or was he merely a scapegoat?
- 2 Why has the murder of the Romanovs attracted so much speculation related to the occult and otherwise?
- 3 Which man supposedly fired the fatal shot into Rasputin?
  - a Oswald Rayner
  - b Felix Yusupov
  - c Peter Badmaev
  - d Father Iliodor

## ANSWER

3. a. Oswald Rayner





# Hitler, Nazism, and the Occult

**T**his chapter's topic is Nazi occultism. It looks at the influence of the occult on Adolf Hitler personally and its wider influence on the Nazi Party.

## ***The Morning of the Magicians***

In 1960, a curious book—*The Morning of the Magicians*—appeared in Paris and unexpectedly became an international best seller. The authors were a right-wing journalist, Louis Pauwels, and a Jewish physicist and ex-communist named Jacques Bergier. They were brought together by a mutual interest in things magical and mysterious.

Pauwels and Bergier portray Hitler as a man possessed by dark forces who used him as a vehicle to accomplish their insidious goals. In this view, Nazism becomes the outward manifestation of a deeper, occult agenda.

The authors point their fingers mainly at the Thule Society, an occult organization that functioned in Munich between 1918 and 1923. The Thule Society was quite real and was connected to early Nazism. However, Hitler's connection to Thule is harder to pin down.

Pauwels and Bergier relied heavily on the writings of a one-time Hitler associate named Hermann Rauschning to reach their astounding conclusions. Rauschning broke with the Nazis in 1934 and soon fled Germany.

In 1939, he wrote a book known by multiple titles, including *Hitler Speaks*, in which he recounts his impressions of Hitler. Rauschning claims that Hitler was “a man possessed,” carried away by “forces of dark and destructive violence.” However, Rauschning makes no mention of the Thule Society.

## **Other Sources**

Rauschning's relationship with Hitler and his recollections are questionable. We have only his word to take for any of it. But Rauschning wasn't the only one to suggest similar things. Josef Greiner, who claimed to have roomed with Hitler in pre-World War I Vienna, said he witnessed Hitler experimenting with telepathy and “occult mysteries.”

The Nazis did their best to erase the Thule Society's existence. Still, mentions of the Thule Society popped up here and there, as in the writings of a German refugee, Konrad Heiden. Pauwels and Bergier seem to have blended these references with Rauschning's supposed recollections.

Hitler's days in Vienna from 1909 to 1913 are the murkiest period in his life. At the time, Vienna was the cosmopolitan capital of the Austro-Hungarian empire. It was veritably teeming with mediums, fortune-tellers, astrologers, and occultists. Out of this mystical brew, two esoteric orders emerged. They preached a mixture of German neo-paganism laced with anti-Semitism loosely dubbed Ariosophy.

## The Ariosophists

The Ariosophists concocted the idea of a purely German Aryan race descended from a long-vanished and spiritually advanced civilization. In some versions of the idea, this civilization was in the Arctic and called Thule.

The first Ariosophist was Guido von List, who dreamed of reviving the cult of the old German war god Wotan. He dubbed his group the High Armanen Order. List was soon followed by a former pupil who called himself Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, known as Lanz for short. Lanz founded a group dubbed the Order of New Templars and obsessed over racial purity.

Ariosophists also embraced the swastika as a racial symbol, even though there was nothing uniquely German about it. They also made a big deal about runes, which are an ancient form of Germanic writing.

They reviled Jews as the racial antithesis of Aryans. The future would see Nazis embrace all of this. Membership in the Ariosophist cults widely overlapped, and in 1912 some followers of Lanz and List merged to form another group, the Germanic Order.

Hitler, while in Vienna, read Lanz's magazine *Ostara*. He was certainly familiar with Ariosophist ideas, but it's more difficult to prove their influence on him.

Around 1916, the Germanic Order spun off yet another group called the Germanic Order Walvater of the Holy Grail. *Walvater* is another term for the war god Wotan.

## Growth of the Thule

In Munich, a branch of the Walvater sect operated under the cover name of the Thule Society. In 1917, it came under the control of a German Freemason, Rosicrucian, and Sufi mystic named Rudolf von Sebottendorff. He had recently returned from Turkey.

Sebottendorff built Thule's membership from a measly 100 to as many as 1,500. Back in Turkey, Sebottendorff had been deep in political intrigue. The esoteric Masonic lodges he was associated with were hotbeds of revolutionary conspiracy that had seized control of the Ottoman Empire in 1908.

In Munich, Sebottendorff plunged right back into the same activity in another tottering empire. In November 1918, imperial Germany threw in the towel, and World War I ended. Defeat ignited a revolution that swept away the Kaiser and created the so-called Weimar Republic: the very regime that Hitler would dedicate himself to destroying.

## Communism

The German revolution also gave rise to a communist movement. In early 1919, radicals proclaimed a Bavarian Soviet Republic in Munich. Communists seized control on April 12 and started a full-blown Bolshevik revolution.

Sebottendorff saw communism as the antithesis of the order that Thule stood for. He started plotting a coup. But on April 26, the Munich communists raided Thule headquarters and took seven members hostage.

On April 30, as the communists' power crumbled, they executed the Thulists. In German folklore and occult tradition, April 30—also known as Walpurgisnacht—is connected to witchcraft, especially to a supposed annual gathering where witches pledged fealty to Satan. The following day, May 1, corresponds to the ancient fertility festival of Beltane, better known as May Day. Besides frolicking around maypoles, the darker side of Beltane included

human sacrifice to nourish new undertakings with blood. Of course, May Day was also International Workers' Day, a day important to the communists who shot the Thulists.

## Hitler's Involvement

According to Sebottendorff, Hitler “entered the halls of Thule” in the summer of 1919, which some take to mean that he joined the order. The war was over, but Hitler was in the army and was selected for training as a propaganda and intelligence agent. His job was to counter communist subversion.

That entailed collaboration with groups like Thule. Most likely, Hitler was never a formal Thule member—his army bosses wouldn't allow that—but he certainly knew plenty of Thulists, most notably Rudolf Hess, his friend and later official. Hitler probably attended Thule gatherings as a guest.

In September 1919, Thule members accompanied Hitler to a meeting of the tiny German Workers' Party, which was a political offshoot of the Thule Society. Hitler joined the party and rose quickly in its ranks. Not long after that, the German Workers' Party became the National Socialists—the Nazis.

Sebottendorff left Germany and returned to Turkey. But that didn't end Thule or its connection to Hitler. The group's spiritual leader, Dietrich Eckart, became Hitler's new mentor. According to the journalist Konrad Heiden, Eckart “had a strong influence on the younger man, probably the strongest anyone ever has had on him.”

Pauwels and Bergier claim that Eckart recognized Hitler as a natural medium who could channel “forces outside himself.” After Eckart died in 1923, Hitler continued to be surrounded by former Thulists, including Hess, Alfred Rosenberg, and even his personal lawyer, Hans Frank.

Sebottendorff himself surfaced again in 1933, right after Hitler became chancellor. He wrote a book, *Before Hitler Came*, which described Thule's role in the birth of the Nazi movement. Hitler was not pleased. The Nazis suppressed the book and chased Sebottendorff out of Germany. Within Nazi ranks, Thule became a verboten subject. The question of why remains.

## Other Occult Connections

Another place to look for connections between Hitler and the occult is his reading habits. Hitler was a voracious reader and amassed a personal library of at least 16,000 volumes. Only a fraction of these survived the war. That fraction includes several esoteric works. Perhaps the one that stands out most is a 1923 copy of Ernst Schertel's *Magic: History, Theory and Practice*, which Hitler heavily annotated. The book delves into trance states, possession, sacrifices, and imaginative visualization.

Another encounter between Adolf and the occult occurred during his brief association with the most famous occultist in Germany in the early 1930s, Erik Jan Hanussen. Hanussen made friends in the Nazi Party, which led to personal meetings between him and Hitler.

In 1932, Hanussen accurately predicted the Nazi surge at the ballot box and vowed that Hitler was destined to become Germany's leader. He also encouraged Hitler with other personalized predictions and psychic readings and is alleged to have helped Hitler expand his hypnotic influence among the German electorate. (Curiously, Hanussen was Jewish.)

As Hanussen predicted, Hitler became chancellor in January 1933. However, the clairvoyant also forecasted the burning of the Reichstag in February 1933. That conflagration—arranged by the Nazis—was key to establishing Hitler's dictatorial control. Not long after, Hanussen's bullet-ridden corpse was found in the woods outside Berlin.

## Links beyond Hitler

Beyond Hitler, the most significant links between Nazism and the occult revolve around Heinrich Himmler, who eventually became Hitler's right hand. Himmler is best known as the founder and leader of the dreaded Schutzstaffel, or SS, whose death's-head insignia emblazoned their all-black uniforms, ceremonial rings, and daggers.

In 1934, Himmler took over the 17th-century Wewelsburg Castle. Himmler adorned Wewelsburg with mystical grail imagery and a round table modeled on King Arthur's. Disturbingly, the castle held a special repository for the rings of dead SS officers—some 12,000 of them.

However, Himmler was more an occult fanboy than a learned adept. He had once held a high position in the so-called Artamanen League, which was a group steeped in Ariosophist racial mysticism. Within the SS, Himmler formed an ancestral research office, the Ahnenerbe, and placed another Artamanen League figure, Wolfram Sievers, at the head of it. Under Sievers, the Ahnenerbe collected information on a vast array of subjects, many of them occult-tinged.

Himmler also enlisted other experts in his quest for occult secrets. One was Karl Maria Wiligut, a former army officer and Ariosophist who proclaimed himself an heir to a line of ancient Germanic holy men. Another was Otto Rahn, who was fascinated by the topic of the Holy Grail.

Additionally, Himmler engaged the Italian occultist Julius Evola during World War II. Evola's assignment was to hunt down rare books of esoteric lore and to investigate the occult symbolism of the Freemasons and other groups.

## CONCLUSION

Nazi connections to the occult are complicated, and the story of Nazi occultism is full of more charlatanism. But many of those involved were utterly convinced of their beliefs. Those beliefs—however fanciful—had real consequences.

## Reading

Luhrssen, David. *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the Birth of Nazism*. Potomac Books, 2012.

## Questions

- 1 Guido von List was the first member of what group?
- 2 Whose writings did Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier rely on heavily to inform *The Morning of the Magicians*?





# The Occult Soviet Union

**T**his chapter focuses on occult influence in the Russia of Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin. Perhaps without fully realizing it, the Bolsheviks set about creating a new system of faith and mysticism to replace the old one. The occult is really a state of mind, and that state of mind was still very much alive in Russia.



## Lenin's Remains

When Vladimir Lenin died in January 1924, the Communist Party, and much of the public, was shocked. But one of Lenin's oldest Bolshevik comrades, Leonid Krasin, believed that science would become all-powerful under communism. The resurrection of historical figures would become reality, and Lenin would be foremost among them.

Krasin was an engineer and economist who served the communist regime as a diplomat and commissar for foreign trade. He was also a devotee of Cosmism, a futurist philosophy. Cosmism embraced everything from transhumanism to cybernetics to space travel, holding that science and technology would overcome all obstacles, including death.

Krasin and other Cosmists formed a quasi-mystical sect within the Bolshevik party dubbed the God-Builders. Another member was Anatoly Lunacharsky, who was also influenced by theosophy: an esoteric system that broadly maintains that the purpose of human life is spiritual evolution and that the soul undergoes reincarnation upon death.

Krasin was especially enamored of the ideas of Cosmist philosopher Nikolai Fedorov, who was a proponent of radical life extension and immortality. This included what we'd now call cloning. But it also envisioned the possibility of resurrecting an individual's consciousness apart from their body—technological necromancy.

Keeping Lenin's remains intact would confer an air of sanctity on him, and, by extension, on the regime he founded. It was a perfect way to enlist the old mysticism of the Russian Orthodox Church—which held that the incorruptibility of a dead body was a sign of sainthood—in the service of the new Marxist regime.

Krasin spearheaded a campaign to preserve Lenin's body. This was called the Immortalization Commission. They tried freezing, but eventually turned to chemical mummification. It worked, at least on a superficial level. Today, Lenin's body still rests in his mausoleum in the Red Square.

## The Secret Police

The Soviet secret police, or Cheka, took an interest in the occult. The regime generally frowned on secret societies and mystical orders. Freemasons were a special target. This seems a bit peculiar because many of the Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin and Leon Trotsky, had at least dipped a toe in the Masonic pool. But that's also exactly how they knew that such groups could be utilized for political and subversive purposes.

A handful of secret societies continued to eke out a precarious existence. These included some Freemasons and Rosicrucians, theosophists, and even Knights Templar. Another was the Leningrad-based Martinist Order, a group of French origin that blended Rosicrucianism, ritual magic, and theosophy.

In 1920, the Russian Martinists were headed by an ex-nobleman, Grigory Myobes, and his medium wife Maria. But the real power was Myobes's secretary, Boris Astromov.

In early 1925, Astromov made a Faustian deal with the Cheka. He became an informer and persuaded the secret police to back him in the creation of a new Red Freemasonry. He argued that communism and Masonry had much in common. Both aspired to the improvement and unity of mankind, and both used the five-pointed star as a symbol.

If his scheme worked, Astromov claimed, Freemasonry could be used to spread communism abroad. But Astromov's idea never got off the ground. In 1926, the secret police arrested him, along with Myobes and many others.

## Alexander Barchenko

The Cheka's interest in the occult also ties in with the stories of Alexander Barchenko and Gleb Boky. Boky was chief of a special section of the Cheka. Barchenko, born in 1881, manifested an interest in all things paranormal. He became fixated on recovering the lost knowledge of a prehistoric civilization, remnants of which he thought might still survive.

Barchenko attended medical school but never graduated. Early on, he gravitated to Masonic and theosophist circles. One of his professors introduced him to the writings of the French esoteric figure Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, and his notions of an advanced underground civilization called Agartha.

D'Alveydre was also closely connected to the French Martinist Order. Barchenko eventually joined the Martinist Order and other groups. Barchenko also immersed himself in palmistry, the tarot, alchemy, hypnosis, astrology, and reading minds.

In late 1918, Barchenko received an ominous summons to the office of the Petrograd Cheka, but he lucked out. Assigned to interrogate him was another devotee of all things occult and mysterious, Konstantin Vladimirov. Vladimirov recruited Barchenko, who eventually landed a job with the Soviet Institute for Brain Studies and Psychic Activities.

The institute was particularly interested in things like hypnotic suggestion, collective hallucinations, and so-called infectious ideas. For the Soviet government, the practical value of this was the propagation of communist ideas among the masses, both at home and abroad, and the neutralization of competing ideas.

Barchenko was dispatched to the far north to study the so-called Arctic madness, a kind of temporary psychosis that afflicted people exposed to long periods of darkness and isolation. The symptoms ranged from catatonia to extreme violence.

Barchenko concluded that the victims entered a trance state that made them highly suggestible. If this could be understood, he argued, it might be possible to program a person to perform certain tasks.

Back in Petrograd (soon to become Leningrad), Barchenko frequented the Kalachakra Buddhist temple run by Agvan Dorzhiev, a Mongol lama. Barchenko was especially intrigued by the tantric use of mantras, or repetitive prayers, to create altered mental states.

## **Gleb Boky and Barchenko**

Eventually, using police connections, Konstantin Vladimirov wangled an introduction to Boky for Barchenko. This meant Barchenko encountered a kindred soul. Though a veteran Bolshevik whose devotion to Lenin went back to the very beginning, Boky was an avid student of the occult.

Drawing Boky to Barchenko was Barchenko's talk of ancient knowledge: a mixture of science and magic that would unlock the powers of the human mind and provide means for its control. This interested Boky because the most important job of his Cheka section was creating and protecting the Soviet Union's secret codes and acquiring or breaking those of enemy states. Boky's goal was finding a secure means to conceal or transfer information and the means to pry it from the minds of opponents.

In the 1930s, Boky secured Barchenko's assignment to the prestigious Institute of Experimental Medicine, where he dabbled in experiments involving hypnosis, telepathy, drugs, and life extension.

However, the end was just around the corner. Purges began in 1936, and all past deeds and associations became suspect. Boky was condemned and shot in November 1937. Barchenko kept talking long enough to prolong his life for a few months, but he got a bullet in the back of the neck in early 1938.

## Nikolai Roerich

Another occult figure of this era was Nikolai Roerich, best known today as a painter and tireless advocate of yoga and Buddhism. He, too, was inspired by theosophy. Like Barchenko, Roerich found himself a tool of Soviet intelligence. With Moscow's encouragement and secret backing, he led an expedition to Tibet in 1925.

Roerich was used to spreading pro-Soviet ideas and recruiting fellow travelers among Western mystics. One of these was Henry Wallace, who would become a member of Franklin Roosevelt's cabinet. For a time, Wallace hailed Roerich as his guru, something that would come back to haunt him when he later tried to run for president.

## Occultism at the Highest Level

This chapter concludes with a look at occult influence at the highest level of communist leadership, namely Lenin and Stalin. Lenin seems to have been immune to the allure of the esoteric. Matters were different with Stalin.

Stalin's native Georgia had a rich tradition of folk magic and superstition. He's also famously credited with being paranoid. Among Stalin's fears were doctors—people able to kill with little or no trace. According to some, he also entertained fears of magical or psychic attack.

In the early 1930s, Stalin employed the services of a so-called hereditary witch, Natalia Lvova, to ward off hostile influences that supposedly emanated from Freemasons and other clandestine groups. Among other things, Lvova warned Stalin to avoid being photographed so that his enemies couldn't use the images to focus their malicious intent.

At the end of the 1930s, another secret police chief, Lavrenty Beria, introduced Stalin to the Polish-born hypnotist and psychic Wolf Messing, who would later claim to have been enlisted in telepathic experiments by Soviet authorities. He basically took up where Barchenko left off.

## CONCLUSION

Occult influences pervaded the Soviet regime and reached the highest levels. Most notably, there was a symbiotic relationship between the occult mystical realm and the intelligence and security services. The occult can survive, even flourish, in even the most hostile environments.

### Reading

Lachman, Gary. *The Return of Holy Russia: Apocalyptic History, Mystical Awakening, and the Struggle for the Soul of the World*. Inner Traditions, 2020.

### Questions

- 1 Why do you think Lenin's body was—and still is—preserved and displayed?
- 2 What do you make of the idea that communism was alchemy by political means?



## Satanism and the Occult

**T**his chapter's topic is Satanism. Some believe in Satan as an actual being, while others view him as the personification of a philosophy or simply a state of mind. Some embrace Satanism as transgression; to others, Satanism represents enlightened self-interest. Still others see Satan and Lucifer, another oft-associated name, as different deities representing different things.



## Fearsome Deities

The modern conception of Satan is a recent invention. In the United States, some Satanists have adopted the winged, goat-headed, cloven-hoofed figure of Baphomet as the image of their god. But that image only dates from the 19th century. The name Baphomet comes from an idol allegedly worshipped by the 14th-century Knights Templar, but nothing described then bears any resemblance to the later goat god.



Going back farther, the Sumerians of ancient Mesopotamia had a god of evil named Hanbi, though he receives little mention. More important was his son Pazuzu, who brought storms, drought, and locusts. Horror movie fans might also remember Pazuzu from *The Exorcist*, where he's equated with the devil. However, the Sumerians invoked his aid against a more malicious demoness, Lamashtu, who brought miscarriage and stillbirth.

The ancient world produced other fearsome deities as well, including the Greek Hecate and the Hindu Kali. Hecate was the goddess of sorcery, including black magic. But Hecate, like Pazuzu, was also a protector of women and children. The Hindu goddess Kali could revel in bloodletting and destruction, but she was more important as a destroyer of evil and protector of innocents. The ancient Egyptians had Set—the god of violence and disorder—but he, too, had his virtues. Most ancient deities had good and bad sides, like nature itself.

## Focusing on the Devil

The position of Satan in traditional Judaism is uncertain. Rabbinical opinion split over whether he was an actual spirit, or just a personification of *yetzer hara*, meaning “inclination to evil.” Regardless, in Judaism, the devil had no agency of his own. He’s only a creature of God. The same is true in Islam, where the Satan figure, Iblis, isn’t the enemy of Allah. He’s simply the adversary of mankind, a tester of faith.

The ancient Greeks and Romans had no devil as we know him. Hades and Pluto were merely overseers of the dead. But the Romans did recognize an array of shadowy deities collectively known as the *di inferi*, meaning “the gods below.” Hecate was one of them, along with Mors, the personification of death, and the Manes, or spirits of the dead.

As for biblical references, the serpent in Eden is commonly assumed to be Satan, but that’s never directly stated. The Old Testament book of Isaiah mentions the Son of the Morning, who displeased God and “fell from the heavens.” The book of Revelation provides another Satanic signifier: the Number of the Beast, or 666, although in early versions of the text, the number is 616.

## Satanism as a Movement

Satanism as a definable movement, or cult, is mostly a product of the 19th-century occult revival. The aim of this revival was to align occultism with the social, political, and economic conditions of the time. The late 19th century saw a decline in traditional religious authority in the West and the rise of militant anticlerical and radical ideas.

Revolution was in the air. Proponents of anarchism and Marxism envisioned themselves, like Lucifer, storming the heaven of the old order. The 1890s also witnessed the first so-called Satanic panic: widespread concern that diabolism both existed and was dangerously on the rise.

Nowhere was this more the case than in France. The 1891 novel *La-Bas* by Karl Huysmans exploited and fueled that anxiety, and it became a best seller. Overall, people feared Satanism, but they were also morbidly fascinated by it.

## The Pope Speaks Out

In 1884, Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical titled *Humanum genus*, which took aim at the well-known and widely popular secret brotherhood of Freemasonry. Leo wasn't the first pope to condemn Freemasons. That had been going on for more than a century. The Masonic order—especially the French variety—was generally associated with free thinking and radicalism, and it seemed to embody everything that the church opposed. Some believed that made it the ideal mask for the work of the devil. Regardless, Pope Leo didn't mince words. He proclaimed the kingdom of God locked in battle with the kingdom of Satan.

An enterprising and unscrupulous journalist named Gabriel Jogand-Pagès spun the pope's encyclical—and Huysmans's tale—into a full-blown Satanic-Masonic conspiracy. Eventually, Jogand-Pagès adopted an alias, Léo Taxil.

However, Taxil's *pièce de résistance* was *The Devil in the 19th Century*, which began as a string of articles and ended up a book three years later. Taxil's book promised to be an expose of every occult vice, from astrology to spiritualism. But his main target remained Freemasonry, at the center of which Taxil placed the cult of the Palladists.

Taxil had a collaborator on *The Devil in the 19th Century*. His name was Dr. Karl Hacks. Little is known about him beyond the fact that he billed himself as a physician and occultist. One of Hacks's key contributions was the invention of a diabolical femme fatale named Sophie-Sappho Walder, whom he alleged to be the great-granddaughter of the Antichrist.

Taxil later morphed her into Diana Vaughan, high priestess of Lucifer. Eventually, facing mounting skepticism and demands that he produce Diana Vaughan in the flesh, Taxil promised to do just that in April 1897. Instead, he used the occasion to announce that the whole thing had been a hoax.

While that should have been the end of things, it wasn't. Many then and now believe that Taxil's Luciferian-Satanic Masonic conspiracy is true, despite his public admission of fraud.

## The 20th Century

A name associated with Satanism in the early 20th century was English occultist Aleister Crowley. Crowley courted the Satanist label by anointing himself the Great Beast 666 and Baphomet. Still, Crowley never regarded himself as a devil worshipper.

In the swinging 1960s, Satanism returned to the public eye once more. In 1967, the Rolling Stones produced an album titled *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, followed in 1968 by the album *Beggars Banquet*, which contains the classic song “Sympathy for the Devil.”

Someone else who cashed in on Satan was Howard Stanton Levey. Adopting the moniker of Anton Szandor LaVey, he founded the Church of Satan in San Francisco on April 30 in 1966. (April 30 is also Walpurgis Night, a traditional holiday celebrated in parts of Europe and Scandinavia.)

**ANTON  
SZANDOR  
LAVEY**



LaVey claimed to have been everything from a lion tamer to a police photographer, but before becoming America's best-known Satanist, he was mostly known around San Francisco as a keyboard player and psychic detective. LaVey's public persona, complete with robes and beard, perfectly matched what most people imagined a Satanist to look like. He painted his house black, and in 1969, he published *The Satanic Bible*, full of rituals people could perform at home. He also hosted theatrical black masses with a naked female as altar. This garnered plenty of media and celebrity attention.

Interestingly, LaVey indicated he didn't believe in Satan as a god or in any god. Instead, he said his form of worship was based on "ethical egoism" and "humanistic values." It was essentially a lifestyle choice. One could look at its public rituals as psychodrama mixed with fancy Halloween parties, or Satanism for show and profit.

Of course, if a person forms a Church of Satan, it's bound to attract some people who really want to worship the devil. In 1975, a group of disaffected members led by the US Army psychological operations specialist Michael Aquino broke away from LaVey's church and formed their own organization. They dubbed it the Temple of Set.

Today, Satanism is recognized as a legally protected religion that performs public black masses and honors goat-headed Baphomet. Genuine Satanism is rather rare, but perhaps relevant is this memorable line from the film *The Usual Suspects*: "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."

## Reading

Barton, Blanche. *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Authorized Biography of Anton LaVey*. Feral House, 1990.

Taylor, Troy. *The Devil & All His Works: A History of Satan, Sin, Murder, Mayhem & Magic*. Whitechapel Productions, 2013.

## Questions

- 1 Do you think Lucifer and Satan are two different entities, or are they the same thing under different names?
- 2 Who founded the Church of Satan in 1966?
  - a Vito Paulekas
  - b Jack Parsons
  - c Aleister Crowley
  - d Anton Szandor LaVey

## ANSWER

2. d. Anton Szandor LaVey

# The Occult Renaissance and Reformation

**T**he occult Renaissance and Reformation occurred roughly from the 14th through the 17th centuries. This was a time of many changes, including a gradual shift from the concept of a magical universe to a mechanical one. A central feature of the magical, or occult, universe is that it's infused with consciousness at every level. Essentially, it's alive. The mechanical universe, on the other hand, is a machine. It moves and reacts but has no mind or purpose. In the mechanical universe, there's no consciousness but human consciousness. The occult doesn't fit into this picture, which is how occultism and science began to separate.

## Paris, 1622

One morning in 1622, Parisians woke up to find the walls of the city plastered with strange posters purportedly from the “Deputies of the Higher College of the Rose-Croix.” They claimed to have “the ability to speak all manners of tongues of the countries where we choose to be, to draw our fellow creatures from error of death.” Some days later, more posters appeared, announcing that they would find those whose inclination “seriously impels” them toward joining.

Considering that details about the posters are vague, chances are that most Parisians gave them no more than passing attention. Still, they excited fevered speculation among scholars, theologians, and especially occultists. Were they genuine or a hoax? Starting in the 17th century, various Rosicrucian groups, as they are known, appeared mysteriously. Some exist to the present day.

## Earlier Appearances

The Parisian posters weren’t the first time the Rosicrucians’ name had appeared. About a decade earlier, the first of three so-called Rosicrucian manifestos surfaced in Germany. While the author was anonymous, the *Fama Fraternitatis* (*The Story of the Brotherhood*) was supposedly the account of Brother C. R. C., who, around the year 1400, embarked on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He ended up being initiated into a sect of Arab occultists who were said to have instructed him in the “esoteric truths of the ancient past.” He returned to Europe via Spain, where he encountered another mystical order: the Alumbados, or Illuminati.

Eventually, Brother C. R. C. made his way home to Germany, where he recruited a small band of acolytes, imparted his wisdom to them, and swore them to secrecy for 120 years. He supposedly passed on in 1484 at 106.

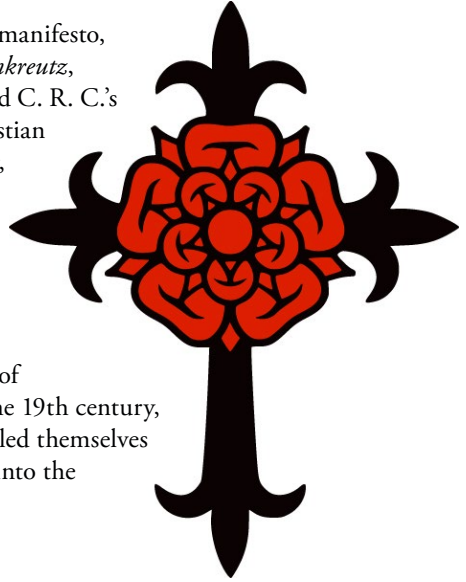
A few decades later, during the early 1500s, the symbol later associated with the Rosicrucians, a red and white rose superimposed on a cross, appeared as an emblem of a religious order in Portugal called the Order of Christ. This was the renamed and legendary Knights Templar. That has spurred speculation that the Rosicrucian brotherhood that announced itself in the 17th century was also a manifestation of the Templars.



In 1615, a second Rosicrucian manifesto appeared. This *Confessio Fraternitatis* offered a bit more insight into the brotherhood's goal, which was nothing less than the "universal reformation of mankind." This sounds vaguely alchemical. The Rosicrucians were steeped in alchemy, along with other aspects of the occult. Some argue that C. R. C.'s travels and the whole Rosicrucian plan are an allegory for alchemy's goal of transforming humanity into a higher state of being.

That theory was reinforced by the third manifesto, *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, which emerged in 1617. It finally revealed C. R. C.'s name as Christian Rosenkreutz, or Christian Rose-Cross. A German Protestant writer, Johann Andreae, later claimed that he was the author of *Chymical Wedding*, and that he wrote it as a lampoon. This is open to question.

While no trace of a historical Christian Rosenkreutz can be found, no shortage of candidates have been put forward. By the 19th century, many serious students of the occult labeled themselves Rosicrucians. This tradition continued into the 20th and 21st centuries.



## Flamel, von Hohenheim, and Agrippa

If the Rosicrucians remained mysterious and immaterial, the Renaissance and Reformation produced no shortage of flesh-and-blood occult adepts. Active during this time was a notable figure named Nicolas Flamel.

His documented life ran from 1330 to 1418, and in his day, he was one of Paris's most noted manuscript dealers. That meant that he probably dealt with occult manuscripts. In the centuries following his death, Flamel somehow acquired a reputation as an alchemist.

There are also occult connections to two prominent scholars of the later 15th and early 16th centuries: Theophrastus von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus, and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim. Paracelsus, born in Switzerland, performed work in chemistry that stemmed from an interest in alchemy. He viewed health and the human body as shaped by the occult concept of microcosm-macrocosm, which lines up with the occult phrase, “as above, so below.” And he believed in the therapeutic intervention of elemental spirits.

Agrippa was a German Renaissance physician and polymath best known for his 1533 three-volume work *De occulta philosophia*. It covered everything from alchemy and astrology to divination and ritual magic. Agrippa was also quite taken with the Jewish Kabbalah, a system of mysticism and numerology that sought to reveal the true nature of God.

## Italian Figures

Farther south, in the Renaissance’s Italian heartland, two important occult personages were Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno. Mirandola was an aristocratic wunderkind who loved showing off his intellect and who left a huge impression despite living to only 31. Today, he’s often praised as a notable humanist for his 1484 *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. But he was also an occultist and a firm believer in the Hermetic notion of *prisca theologia*: the primordial divine doctrine that underlays all others. He once argued that the surest proof of Christ’s divinity was Christ’s command of magic to perform miracles.

Coming along a century later, Giordano Bruno was a Dominican friar. Bruno was also well-versed in occult doctrines and the latest astronomical discoveries. He proposed, for instance, that stars were other suns with their own planets. He championed the notion of the transmigration of souls and what he phrased as the “continuous reformation of man,” which sounds like the Rosicrucians’ “universal reformation of mankind.”

Bruno, too, has been suggested as the author of the manifestos. The Roman Inquisition wasn’t amused by any of this, though, and Bruno was burned at the stake in 1600.

## English Figures

The spirit of the occult Renaissance also found its way to foggy England, especially during the 16th-century reign of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth's so-called court magician, Dr. John Dee, had taken a keen interest in alchemy and astrology early in life. In 1555, during the reign of Elizabeth's Catholic half sister Mary, Dee was charged with treason for casting horoscopes of the queen.

These were unfavorable, and he was accused of magically calculating Mary's death. He talked his way out of trouble, but magically or not, his prediction of Mary's demise proved correct. Three years later, he entered Elizabeth's service as an adviser and astrologer, and he picked her coronation date based on its auspicious alignments. As the queen's adviser, he promoted naval power, exploration, and colonies. However, by the early 1580s, Dee was completely immersed in occult pursuits and mostly dropped out of court affairs.

Sir Walter Raleigh and playwright Christopher Marlowe are other examples of Elizabethan occultism. They're often connected to a secretive group sometimes referred to as the School of Night, but officially called the School of Atheism. Essentially, this group delved into matters regarded forbidden or blasphemous. Inevitably, occultism was part of the mix.

The Elizabethan heyday ended in 1603 with James I's ascent to the throne. His name is famously associated with the King James Bible, but James also took a keen interest in the occult. In 1597, he authored a Socratic dialogue called *Daemonologie* that defined and condemned witchcraft and divination. It included references to vampires and werewolves.

Under James, the persecution of witches—real or imagined—reached a murderous crescendo, and magicians were relegated to obscurity. But that wasn't true elsewhere.

## Events Elsewhere

From 1576 to 1612, the Holy Roman emperor Rudolf II's court in Prague became the magical capital of Europe, reveling in alchemy, astrology, and almost every other form of occult arts. Rudolf's physician and adviser,

Michael Maier, was himself an alchemist and an outspoken champion of the Rosicrucians. Naturally, Maier was widely suspected of being a Rosicrucian. It's a good bet that the roots of the Rosicrucian manifestos can somehow be traced back to Rudolf's court.

The Reformation incited the Counter-Reformation by the Roman Catholic Church. There was occultism present there as well. The spearhead of the Counter-Reformation was a new religious order, the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, founded in the 1500s. It began with the Spanish nobleman and soldier Ignatius Loyola.

In the 1520s, Loyola's leg was shattered by a cannonball. During the slow, agonizing recovery that followed, he experienced a spiritual awakening. His quest led him to the Alumbrados. Alumbrado rituals revolved around inducing visions that gave personal union with the divine.

Loyola started to experience wonderful and terrifying visions. Some, he later decided, were diabolical. But his mystical experiences eventually led him into the priesthood. With the help of more revelations, he established his order in 1540.

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## Questions

- 1 Who do you think wrote the Rosicrucian manifestos?
- 2 In what sense was the Reformation an occult struggle as well as a religious one?

# Witchcraft and the Occult

**T**his chapter looks at witchcraft, which is one of the best-known and most misunderstood aspects of the occult. It concentrates on the writings and theories of two professed 20th-century experts on the subject: Margaret Murray and Montague Summers.

## Margaret Murray

Margaret Murray was born in India in 1863. Her career got underway during the Victorian era and continued until her death in 1963, at the age of 100. During the 1890s, she studied archaeology in London, specializing in Egyptology. In 1898, she was among the first female instructors at London's University College. Murray was a trained academic who knew how to conduct research and assess information.



**MARGARET MURRAY**

Most relevant to this chapter is her 1921 book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*. It arose out of her parallel interest in British folklore. Murray delved into the records of witch trials in England, Scotland, France, Germany, and Scandinavia. Her conclusion was that these records recorded the survival of a fertility cult of unknown antiquity. This was a cult with a hierarchy, organized beliefs, rites, and a god, to which most members clung with fierce allegiance.

Murray distinguished two types of witchcraft. She used the term *operative witchcraft* for what otherwise might be called folk magic. This mostly consists of spells, charms, potions, and the like.

Murray argued that the second type—termed *ritual witchcraft*—is something different. Though not unique to western Europe, ritual witchcraft, Murray believed, had a special influence there as the survival and adaptation of an ancient fertility religion. She named this the Dianic religion, after the Roman nature deity Dianus, who can be seen as a version of the Greek deity Pan.

The witch cult, according to Murray, believed that its own god's embodiment in the material realm had to be periodically sacrificed to ensure the cycle of fertility. There is a parallel to Christianity here: While the Christian mass ritual symbolically recounts Jesus's sacrifice, the witch cult's traditions demanded the literal killing of their deity, or rather of the man or woman chosen to embody him.

Eventually, in the 1960s, after Murray's death, a new generation of scholars basically deemed Murray's cult a fantasy based on the selective reading of unreliable sources. The critique isn't entirely without merit, but to dismiss her theory out of hand is perhaps going too far. She might have been onto something.

The specter of an organized witch cult had earlier been proposed by the Prussian criminologist Karl Jarcke back in 1828. Later, in 1899, American folklorist Charles Leland published *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*, which purported to reveal a witch cult in Tuscany.

## Montague Summers

Among the first to take issue with Murray's portrayal of witchcraft was a self-educated student of the occult named Montague Summers. Born in 1880 as the son of a banker, Summers was ordained as a deacon in the Church of England in 1908. Accusations of sexual misconduct toward choirboys and Summers's undisguised interest in Satanism led him to leave the Anglican faith and convert to Roman Catholicism.

In 1926, Summers's book *History of Witchcraft and Demonology* came out. While Summers agreed with the academician Murray that an organized witch cult existed, his view of it took a very different direction. Summers's basic contention was that the so-called witch cult was the degenerate survival of the Manichee sect, which had been a powerful rival of Christianity during the late Roman Empire. It arose again under various names during the Middle Ages, most notably as the Cathar heresy in France and Italy. The Catholic church responded with a genocidal crusade that destroyed the Cathars as a visible movement—but perhaps not as an invisible one.

The essence of Manichaeism is the belief in two gods. One is a benevolent, if somewhat detached, deity that reigns over the world beyond. The other is an evil spirit, or demiurge, who oversees the physical world.

The Cathars and their ilk outwardly insisted that the official Christian churches were the tools of the evil god and that everything they taught and did was false. Thus, doing exactly the opposite of everything the church commanded seemed the logical course.

As Summers saw it, the Manichees fell right into the devil's hands. Under the crushing weight of their false logic and the relentless persecution of the church, Summers felt the sect degenerated into a cult driven by spite and revenge, whose primary weapons became "terrorism and secret murder." Like Murray, Summers made a lot of assumptions based on thin evidence.

## Other Notable Happenings

In 1735, the British Parliament eliminated criminal penalties for practicing witchcraft. Instead, it criminalized any claims of magical powers by oneself or others. The crime was no longer witchcraft but claiming that witchcraft existed. That statute would remain on the books until 1951. It seems that the powers that be just didn't want to talk about the subject anymore. In the meantime, witches became known as cunning folk and continued to ply their arts in the countryside.



The most famous cunning man in 19th-century Britain—and arguably the progenitor of much modern witchcraft—was a humble Essex farm laborer named George Pickingill. Born around 1816, Pickingill was allegedly part of a hereditary coven around the village of Canewdon.

As a cunning man, Pickingill offered cures for assorted ailments and help in finding lost items, all without charge. It went unspoken that Pickingill's healing powers also gave him the power to harm. It was reckoned unwise to refuse him a free drink at the pub, treat him with disrespect, or deny him a favor.

Pickingill probably would have remained a local oddity if his story hadn't been picked up and popularized in the 1970s by British occultist E. W. Liddell. In Liddell's hands, Pickingill became a card-carrying member of Murray's Dianic cult, an inveterate enemy of all things Christian, and the founder of no less than nine covens across England.

Liddell also credited Pickingill with providing the foundation for the largest witchcraft religion existing today: Wicca. This claim has been vigorously contested by other witches. And besides Liddell's assertions, there's little else to go on.

The generally recognized founder of Wicca is Gerald Gardner. Born in 1884, Gardner worked in the Far East for several years before moving back to England in the 1930s, by which time he'd acquired a keen interest in the occult. He became a Freemason and Rosicrucian, and he was eventually initiated into the New Forest Coven—one of the very covens attributed to Pickingill. Gardner recorded the coven's spells and rituals in a work he called the *Book of Shadows*.

One of Gardner's protégés, the witch high priestess Doreen Valiente, claimed that Gardner was prone to exaggeration and made up most of his creed or simply borrowed it from Masonic and other rituals. Gardner is also commonly used to rope the English occultist Aleister Crowley into the witchcraft picture.

Gardner briefly met Crowley in 1946, by which time Crowley was terminally ill and broke. Gardner came calling to buy a license to perform certain rituals of a sect Crowley controlled, the *Ordo Templi Orientis*.

Liddell and others later spun stories that Crowley had been a member of one of Pickingill's covens and handed over all its ancient rituals to Gardner. Another version is that in exchange for initiating Gardner into the Ordo Templi Orientis, Gardner initiated Crowley into the New Forest Coven, transforming him into a warlock. The truth is elusive.

Crowley never publicly claimed any connection to Pickingill or witchcraft. He acknowledged witchcraft's place in the greater occult scheme of things, but he may have been too much of a lone wolf to be part of a coven, let alone lead one.

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### Questions

- 1 Who do you think gives a more convincing portrait of witchcraft, Margaret Murray or Montague Summers?
- 2 Is Wicca better thought of as based on ancient traditions or as a modern reimagining of witchcraft?



# The Occult Enlightenment

**T**his chapter's topic is the occult Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's timeframe essentially corresponds to the 18th century, a period popularly associated with the ascendance of reason, empiricism, and science. However, along with those, mysticism of every sort flourished. Occultism came out of the shadows and into the mainstream, as shown by three prominent figures: Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, the comte de Saint-Germain, and Franz Anton Mesmer.

## Count Alessandro di Cagliostro

During the spring of 1785, Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, a mysterious Italian, was perhaps the most talked-about man in Paris. Audiences came to swoon over this mystic's performances. However, he was neither a real count nor even a Cagliostro. While his origins are obscure, the best bet is that he was born Giuseppe Balsamo in Sicily around 1743.

He said he was the orphan son of Italian nobles. Around the age of 12, he claimed to have embarked on a magical mystery tour of Egypt, Mecca, and other locations, soaking up the secrets of alchemy, Jewish kabbalistic mysticism, and ritual magic. Cagliostro's supposed path of enlightenment closely followed that of the famed founder of Rosicrucianism, Christian Rosenkreutz.

In 1771, still known as Giuseppe Balsamo, he popped up in London, where he was a dispenser of love potions, youth elixirs, and other so-called alchemical cures. Ultimately, he was forced to flee one step ahead of the police. But by 1776, he was back in London, this time in the guise of Count de Cagliostro and flush with money from some unknown source. Notably, this was the same year that Adam Weishaupt formed the Order of Illuminati in Bavaria.

A year later, Cagliostro followed Weishaupt's example by joining a Masonic lodge. From this point on, Cagliostro's activities centered on promoting his own special brand of Egyptian Freemasonry.

By 1784, Cagliostro had relocated to Lyons, France, where he founded the Lodge of Triumphant Wisdom, the so-called mother lodge of Egyptian Freemasonry. It attracted many wealthy followers, and Cagliostro's fame soon spread to Paris. By early 1785, he'd relocated there to a house on Rue Saint-Claude, where guests sometime came to watch his activities.

Cagliostro's ceremonies featured extravagant theatrical displays. Additionally, many of Cagliostro's pills and potions bragged aphrodisiac qualities, and, distinct from most other Masonic orders, his Egyptian brand initiated both men and women. The initiation rituals had a decidedly erotic quality.

For all his fame, Cagliostro didn't lack for detractors, and his downfall was just around the corner. According to the researcher Terry Melanson, many regarded Cagliostro as "a cheating trickster and the embodiment of falsehood, if not the Devil himself." His real trouble began in the summer of 1785, when one of his followers, Cardinal de Rohan, was implicated in a scandal known as the Affair of the Diamond Necklace. Because he was linked to Cardinal de Rohan, Cagliostro was arrested and tried as an accomplice. After months in the Bastille prison, he was finally acquitted. But King Louis XVI banished him from France.

Cagliostro landed in Rome in 1789, where he tried to reestablish Egyptian Freemasonry. That was a big mistake. Rome was part of the pope's personal domain, and the Inquisition soon snatched up Cagliostro. After a torturous interrogation, he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death as a Freemason, heretic, and sorcerer. The pope commuted this to life imprisonment, and he spent his final years in the remote Fortress of San Leo.

## **The Comte de Saint-Germain**

Cagliostro was the last of an occult triumvirate that had started 40 years earlier with another mystical nobleman of dubious provenance, the comte de Saint-Germain. Saint-Germain was, and probably still is, best known for his claims of astounding longevity, if not outright immortality. But Saint-Germain's legendary agelessness and alleged links to Transylvania have inevitably given rise to stories in which he becomes a vampire.

Like Cagliostro, Saint-Germain's origins are obscure. In 1745, he was living in London, where he came under suspicion of espionage. By 1748, he'd relocated to Paris and would come and go for the next decade. Saint-Germain claimed to possess arcane knowledge gleaned from historical personages ranging from Pythagoras to Jesus, because he'd either met them in person or communicated with their spirits. Saint-Germain also claimed to be able to alchemically manufacture diamonds and other precious stones, which presumably accounted for his seemingly inexhaustible wealth.

Saint-Germain rarely mentioned occult matters in public. But he was more open with a group of select acolytes. According to the occultist and writer Éliphas Lévi, he led them in rituals that involved “suspicious evocations and strange apparitions.”

Saint-Germain was in Germany at the end of the 1770s, around when Adam Weishaupt set up the Illuminati. And Saint-Germain later secured the patronage of Prince Karl of Hesse-Kassel. Prince Karl hailed Saint-Germain as “the greatest philosopher who had ever lived” and financed the count’s alchemical experiments until his reported death in 1784.

## Franz Anton Mesmer

Coming after Saint-Germain, another prominent occult figure in Paris was a German named Franz Anton Mesmer. He’s generally credited as an early practitioner of hypnotism, though his practices arguably seem to have had more to do with electromagnetism.

Compared to Saint-Germain and Cagliostro, Mesmer’s life is an open book. Born in 1734, he honed his craft as a traveling physician and astrologer. Mesmer viewed himself more as a scientist than an occultist, and he believed that he discovered a natural energy that flowed through everything. He termed this *animal magnetism* in living creatures, and he claimed that its unimpeded flow was essential to health.

His treatments to restore animal magnetism’s circulation in humans took various forms. Most often, they involved him touching or stroking parts of the afflicted person, sometimes for hours at a time.

The common assumption today is that Mesmer used hypnotism to treat psychosomatic afflictions. This was perhaps sometimes true, but in other cases, he wired his patients to contraptions that seemed like crude batteries made from water and earth. These may have generated low-voltage electricity that Mesmer combined with physical manipulation to provide sexual stimulation.

Mesmer brought his therapy to Paris in 1778, and it gained great popularity—and generated controversy. In 1784, King Louis XVI launched an investigation into Mesmer's activities. Two members of the commission were American ambassador Benjamin Franklin, a Freemason, and Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, who would give his name to the French Revolution's most infamous invention.

The commission never questioned Mesmer personally, but it concluded there was no evidence to support the existence of animal magnetism. Mesmer left for Switzerland just as Cagliostro arrived in Paris, and he continued to experiment and practice until his death in 1815.

## Examples Elsewhere

France was the intellectual and political center of the 18th-century world. But the occult Enlightenment wasn't French alone. In England, there arose an array of unusual characters and organizations. One of the most interesting examples was Rabbi Hayyim Samuel Jacob Falk. Probably born in Poland, and once nearly burned at the stake in Germany for sorcery, he arrived in London in 1742, flat broke.

Over the next 40 years, Falk acquired wealth and influence. Part of this had to do with the patronage of a London banker, Aaron Goldschmidt. But Falk claimed to have a magical knack for attracting money.

Among the feats attributed to him was an ability to keep candles and lamps burning for months on end, and to magically transport objects over great distances. He was also credited with saving London's Great Synagogue from a fire by inscribing a kabbalistic sign on its doorposts. But Falk wasn't universally admired. Many in the Jewish community considered him a charlatan or a diabolist.

For a time, Falk was also the neighbor of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg incorporated kabbalistic symbolism into his brand of esoteric Christianity, which was based on ecstatic visions of God and heaven. The occultism of Falk and Swedenborg influenced the English poet and painter William Blake, whose own ecstatic visions and spirit communications shaped his art.

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## Question

- 1 Some say the Enlightenment was fundamentally the alchemy of ideas. What do you make of that proposition?





## American Occultism

**T**his chapter looks at the influence of the occult in early American history. It begins with a look at the so-called Long Island witch case, then turns to other mysterious stories.

## The Long Island Witch Case

On a frigid night in February 1658, Elizabeth Gardiner Howell cowered at the foot of her bed, screaming in terror at something no one else could see. “A witch!” she wailed. Elizabeth’s father, Lion Gardiner, begged her to describe what it was. “A thing, all dressed in black!” she screamed.

Before slipping into unconsciousness, Elizabeth identified the black figure as Goody Garlick, a neighbor in the small colonial village of East Hampton, Long Island. The next day, she died. Barely 16, she’d given birth to a baby a few days earlier. Her father accepted her untimely demise as God’s will.

Local magistrates took depositions from 13 locals. They all accused Goody Garlick of sickening and injuring people and animals through her use of the evil eye. The problem was that the stories all traced back to a single local gossip, Goody Davis, who declined to offer testimony. Further complicating matters was that the village, consisting of about 30 families, was a cesspit of petty feuds.

Because Goody Garlick and her husband Joshua were better off than many of their neighbors, they were a target of envy and resentment and at the center of many of these disputes. Clearly, Goody Garlick could never get a fair trial in East Hampton. But the charge of witchcraft—a capital offense—was too serious to just brush aside.

At the time, Long Island was part of the Connecticut colony, where at least two women had already been hanged as witches. The magistrates kicked the case up to the high court in Hartford. Goody was fortunate that her case landed in front of the new colonial governor, John Winthrop Jr. He was a trained lawyer who understood the importance of evidence, and he was also an occultist, or at least an alchemist.

According to one biographer, Winthrop “spent his life seeking mastery over the hidden powers of the universe.” That pursuit led him to believe that magic—real magic—was beyond the capabilities of an uneducated woman such as Goody Garlick.

Eventually, Garlick was found not guilty and sent back home to Long Island. At the time, however, not guilty wasn’t the same thing as innocent. Winthrop merely ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prove that Garlick was a witch.

Garlick and her husband wasted no time suing Goody Davis for defamation, but the case never came to trial. Davis died two weeks later. If that made anyone suspicious, they seem to have kept it to themselves. Goody and Joshua Garlick lived out the rest of their lives in East Hampton.

## Noises in Moodus

Another tale comes from the tiny village of Moodus, near East Haddam in Connecticut. The local Wangunk tribe called the vicinity Mackimoodus, meaning “place of bad noises.” These noises were variously described as sounding like pistol shots, thunder, logs rolling down stairs, or a low, pulsating thrum. The effect seemed to differ from person to person. The sounds could go silent for years, only to suddenly resume.

Wangunk shamans were convinced that the noises emanated from an angry god, Hobomoko, who was said to live underground. For centuries, the shamans performed prayers and sacrifices to appease the angry spirit, but to no avail. English settlers identified Hobomoko with the devil.

The first European account of these sounds is from 1702. The consensus, then and now, is that the noises have a seismic origin. After a big earthquake in 1727, they went silent for several years.

No one could quite pin down the noises’ precise point of origin. The best guess was a place called Cave Hill. However, efforts to explore the caverns there were thwarted by the noxious air.

According to an 1840 article in the *American Journal of Science*, word of the Moodus noises spread across the Atlantic and attracted the attention of an alchemist who called himself Dr. Steele. Arriving in East Haddam around 1760, Steele claimed to have been commissioned by King George II to get to the bottom of the mystery. No one quite believed this—or even that Steele was English—but they were content to let him try.

Steele lodged with a family named Knowlton, and he rented an old blacksmith’s shop that he turned into a laboratory. The alchemist did a lot of digging around Cave Hill, mostly at night. One evening, he told the Knowltons he’d found and removed “a great fossil called a carbuncle,”

which he said had caused most of the trouble. Steele also claimed that there was a smaller carbuncle that was more difficult to access, and which would continue to cause noises, even if not so loud or often. Steele reputedly showed Mr. Knowlton a large, round stone—presumably the great carbuncle—which at first looked like an ordinary rock. When Steele extinguished the lanterns, however, the stone reputedly glowed with a cold white light.

Steele and the carbuncle soon vanished from East Haddam, never to be seen again. One can only wonder what he did with his find.

## Powwow Magic

In Pennsylvania Dutch country, there's a tradition known as Powwow. It's a form of German folk magic that came with immigrant Amish and Mennonites. Powwow practitioners present themselves as pious Christians. They tote around a Bible, and their spells and incantations invoke the power of Jesus.

Powwow magic mostly centers on healing, including spells to stop bleeding and remove the pain of burns. Another focus is protection from evil spirits or influences like the evil eye. As an example, hex signs adorning old barns may have an important, occult function in protecting the building and animals inside.

### HEX SIGNS ON BARN



The first printed compendium of Powwow folk magic appeared in 1820 and was titled *The Long Lost Friend*. It was based on an earlier German text. Also relevant to Powwow is the work known as *The 6th and 7th Books of Moses*, which purported to relate how Moses learned the secrets of Egyptian magic and used them to defeat the pharaoh's sorcerer-priests to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. *The 6th and 7th Books of Moses* didn't appear in print until around 1850, but a careful examination shows they were based on much older esoteric works such as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's 1533 *De occulta philosophia* and the 1575 *Arbatel of Ancient Magic*.

That still leaves the question of where the name *Powwow*—associated with Native Americans—entered the picture. The Algonquin root for *powwow* refers to healing. Many curative plants in America were different from those in Europe. Therefore, it is very likely the Pennsylvania practitioners tapped the knowledge of native shamans.

## HOODOO MAGIC

A notable form of syncretic American folk magic is Hoodoo. Hoodoo was the creation of enslaved Africans who combined western African traditions, gods, and magic with Native American ones and Christianity. For instance, Hoodoo symbolism embraces the Bible, the cross, and other Christian images. Its prayers and offerings are commonly made to God, though whether to the Christian one is a matter of opinion and intent. Working spells to harm or kill are permissible in Hoodoo if the user has just cause, and such causes include personal retribution.

## The Penitents

In the rugged mountains of northern New Mexico arose another esoteric current: the Penitentes, also known as the Brothers of the Pious Fraternity of Our Father Jesus the Nazarene. They have their roots in medieval Spain and the lay religious societies, or *cofradías*, that grew out of the Third Order of Saint Francis. Such lay orders appealed to those who wanted to engage in organized religious devotion but had no desire to become monks or nuns.

The lack of priestly supervision often meant that these orders were often viewed with suspicion and suppressed by church authorities. The Spanish Penitentes, much like English Puritans, found it easier to practice their beliefs in the wilds of America.

Penitente practices centered on ascetic rituals that included shackling, self-flagellation, and, at Easter, mock crucifixion. The occult aim of these rituals was to induce a state of ecstasy and personal union with the deity and greater world beyond through pain. The brothers organized themselves into Masonic-style lodges, or *moradas*, decked out with skulls and arrays of 13 candles.

Traditionally, Penitentes were buried standing up, their graves often surmounted with a cairn, or pyramid, of stones. Many Roman Catholic officials were not fond of the group. One bishop went so far as to excommunicate the Penitentes in 1888, but that only made them more secretive.

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### Questions

- 1 Was Goody Garlick another victim of jealousy and superstition or a witch who got lucky?
- 2 Can you think of other examples of folk magic from across America and the world?



# The Occult's 19th-Century Revival

**T**he 19th century ushered in the most revolutionary time in human history. New steam-powered ships, electricity, and internal combustion motors drove the Industrial Age, and science and communication took great strides. Because Europeans controlled almost all the technology, wealth, and power, the 19th century also became known as the golden age of European imperialism. And European hegemony also meant that Westerners came into increased contact with foreign beliefs and practices, including occult ones.

## Developments in the 19th Century

The 1800s witnessed a vast expansion of literacy and education. The burgeoning literate public expressed an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, including occult knowledge. Many occultists embraced these changes and exploited them. Occult ideas and symbolism crept into mainstream culture. Things like séances became popular entertainment.

Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism were two common denominators among 19th-century occultists, and most occultists had some association with both. The occult, like everything else, could now be commoditized, packaged, and sold.

Then as now, Freemasons denied that their brotherhood had anything to do with occultism. For ordinary lodges, that was true. Indeed, Freemasonry membership swelled into the millions during the 1800s.

## Helena Blavatsky

A notable figure from this time was Helena Blavatsky. She was born in 1831 as Helena Petrovna Hahn, in what is today Ukraine. Her father was a Russian army officer. Her mother came from the nobility. Eventually, Helena got a reputation for playing tricks, spinning tall tales, and generally being a handful.

At age 17, she married the Russian nobleman Nikifor Blavatsky, then quickly abandoned him. For the next 20 years, Helena roamed the world from Europe to America, and Egypt to India, encountering magicians, swamis, and seers along the way. How many of her reputed experiences were real and how many were the product of her vivid imagination remains a nagging question.

By the late 1850s, Helena Blavatsky was billing herself as a trance medium. Strange phenomena were said to appear wherever she went. Eventually, Blavatsky even dabbled in espionage. In 1872, she wrote the chief of Russian intelligence, offering to become an agent.



In 1875, she teamed up with the American journalist and spiritual seeker Henry Steel Olcott in New York to found the Miracle Club. This was soon changed to the more serious-sounding Theosophical Society. Theosophy combined Western mysticism with Buddhist, Hindu, and even some Islamic beliefs. Theosophy aimed to be a universal occult doctrine.



## THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY CONVENTION

In 1877, Blavatsky produced the work *Isis Unveiled*, which expounded on everything from spirits to psychic phenomena and the human soul. It sought to show how the ideas of Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism descended from the same ancient roots. *Isis Unveiled* popularized occult ideas and attracted thousands of converts in Europe, the United States, and India. In 1879, Blavatsky and Olcott relocated the society's headquarters from New York to Adyar, India.

Blavatsky's credibility rested on her relationship with mahatmas like Morya and Koot Humi. She claimed that they communicated with her via letters that magically appeared in a sealed shrine next to her bedroom or simply dropped out of the air during séances.

In India, Blavatsky took in a destitute couple, the Coulombs. The Coulombs turned out to be grifters who decided to shake down Blavatsky. After their blackmail failed, they went public with accusations that Blavatsky was a fake who wrote the mahatma letters and used trickery to make them materialize.

The Society for Psychical Research launched an inquiry. The investigator Richard Hodgson summed up his report by declaring Blavatsky “one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting imposters in history.”

In private correspondence, Blavatsky stated that the mahatmas were mortal mystics, and she blamed the American journalist Henry Steel Olcott for turning them into superhuman phantasms. Olcott insisted just the opposite.

Blavatsky and theosophy survived. In 1888, she produced a new work, *The Secret Doctrine*. It was mostly culled from existing occult philosophy, but Blavatsky added the twist of so-called cosmic evolution. Capitalizing on social and intellectual controversy over Darwinism, Blavatsky laid out the psychical and spiritual evolution of human beings across millions of years, purportedly through five root races.

The most recent were the Aryans. Blavatsky didn't define Aryan as strictly European, much less Germanic. But it would be redefined as such by other occult societies in Germany and Austria during the early 20th century, among them the so-called Thule Society. These groups adopted the label of Ariosophy. Their racist occultism would become a key building block of Nazi ideology. Theosophy's subsequent influence was felt not just by Nazis but also by anti-Nazis, liberals, and communists.

Helena Blavatsky was 59 when she died. Theosophy splintered in the years ahead but continued, mutated, and grew.

## Éliphas Lévi

Another key figure in modern occultism was the Frenchman Alphonse Louis Constant, better known as Éliphas Lévi. Born in 1810, Lévi trained for the Catholic priesthood. But a crisis of faith led him to embark on a life dedicated to studying the occult. Deep down, though, Lévi always seemed to remain a Roman Catholic. Over the next 39 years, Lévi churned out 20 books on esoteric subjects ranging from alchemy to ritual magic and Kabbalah, a form of Jewish mysticism.

Arguably, the most important of his books was *The Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*, appearing in 1856. It was based on the major arcana of the tarot, which Lévi believed to be the symbolic remnant of primordial wisdom.

Lévi's most striking contribution to occult iconography was his portrait of the goat-headed figure he called Baphomet. By the late 1800s, this image became widely associated with the devil. Today, some modern Satanists embrace it as a representation of their deity. Others argue that Lévi's Baphomet is only a tongue-in-cheek parody of occult imagery.



**BAPHOMET**

## Stanislaus de Guaita

In the 1880s, a new generation of esoteric orders spouted in France. One of the new breed of occultists was the marquis Stanislaus de Guaita, who was directly inspired by Lévi. In 1888, de Guaita founded the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose-Cross—yet another manifestation of Rosicrucianism. De Guaita amassed a huge occult library. Like Lévi, he also created an image still widely seen today: an inverted pentagram superimposed over a goat's head. This is commonly assumed to be another symbol of Satan.

During de Guaita's lifetime, he was accused of being a closet Satanist. The fact that the man behind that accusation, rival occultist Joseph-Antione Boullan, was also accused of being a devil worshipper only adds to the air of mystery and confusion.

## The Martinist Order

Perhaps the most important esoteric society to emerge in France was the Martinist Order, which came about in 1886. Its central figures were both medical doctors, Augustin Chaboseau and Gerard Encausse. They were also Freemasons and Rosicrucians.

Chaboseau, for a time, was an active theosophist. Chaboseau and Encausse claimed that Martinism was the resurrection of an older mystical system from the previous century. Like many of the new occult groups, it concealed a secretive political agenda.

Chaboseau and Encausse both enjoyed close relations with the French government. Chaboseau would become a government minister, and Encausse, who adopted the magical name Papus, would become a secret agent.

The Martinist Order became an occult tentacle of French influence and foreign policy. For instance, at the beginning of the 20th century, Encausse traveled to Russia, where he spread Martinism and made himself a spiritual adviser to Tsar Nicholas and Empress Alexandra.

## Events in Britain

No Western country saw a greater blossoming of the occult than England. Writer and statesman Edward Bulwer-Lytton helped to get the ball rolling. Bulwer-Lytton was never a Rosicrucian, but he larded his stories with Rosicrucian references, especially his 1842 novel *Zanoni*. This convinced some that he must be an adept.

To Bulwer-Lytton's utter bewilderment, a group of British Rosicrucians anointed him their grand patron in 1870. He was again taken seriously with his 1871 novel *The Coming Race*, which described the discovery of an ancient subterranean civilization that controlled a fabulous all-powerful energy called Vril.

In the 1850s, interest in spiritualism sparked the creation of a discussion group at Cambridge University. In 1862, this morphed into the Ghost Club—one of the first bodies to seriously investigate claims of the supernatural and paranormal. A leading figure in the club was none other than author Charles Dickens.

After Dickens's death in 1870, the Ghost Club went dormant, only to be revived in 1882 by a new group. Among them were the poet William Butler Yeats, scientist Sir William Crookes, and Sherlock Holmes's creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who went on to become an ardent believer in mediums and spiritualism. The year 1882 also saw the creation of the Society for Psychical Research, which would soon investigate Blavatsky.

Britain's most famous Victorian occult order was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It got its start in the 1860s as the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*. It was a group of esoteric Freemasons and aspiring magicians. These were the same Rosicrucians who anointed Bulwer-Lytton their patron. Key members included Arthur Waite, Samuel Liddell Mathers, and William Wynn Westcott. Mathers and Westcott went on to found the Golden Dawn.

The Golden Dawn eventually expanded to five lodges. While it would never number much more than 100 members, those included such notable names as Yeats and *Dracula* author Bram Stoker. Men and women enjoyed equal status in the Golden Dawn.

The Golden Dawn lasted for little more than a decade. Its undoing was the frequent problem of internal rivalry. Mathers pushed Westcott out of the leadership role. But two years later, an executive committee unanimously dumped Mathers and expelled him. The issue was Mathers's controversial promotion of a young Aleister Crowley within the organization.

Crowley displayed some obnoxious behavior and was a fervid proponent of sex magic, which he wanted to introduce in the Golden Dawn rituals. Others disagreed. By 1900, the Golden Dawn was hopelessly splintered, though various successor groups went on for years.

### Reading

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Waite, A. E. *Devil-Worship in France*. George Redway, 1896.

### Questions

- 1 What do you think Éliphas Lévi's version of Baphomet represents?
- 2 Why might infighting be common among certain occult organizations?



## Aleister Crowley's Occult Life

**A**leister Crowley—the self-proclaimed Great Beast 666—was the most influential occultist of the 20th century. This chapter looks at the human being behind the occultist, what drew Crowley to the occult, and his work as an agent of British intelligence.

## Crowley the Person

Aleister Crowley's true name was Edward Alexander Crowley. He was born on October 12, 1875, as the only child of a well-to-do English family. The Crowleys were devout adherents of the Christian fundamentalist Plymouth Brethren. His father, Edward, was so dedicated to the Lord that he put aside commerce to preach the gospel. Aleister would make it his life's mission to replace Christianity, yet father and son were, in their respective ways, each evangelists for their faiths. In an adolescent act of self-assertion, Edward Alexander Crowley adopted the name Aleister—a stylized version of Alexander.

Crowley was utterly devoid of financial acumen. He went through every penny he could beg or borrow, and he died bankrupt. But he started out with options. He was a world-class mountain climber, a chess master, and a writer of some merit. He got into elite Cambridge University, but he never graduated. Instead, Crowley's college years awakened him to the occult.

During winter break in 1896, he had a mystical experience in Stockholm. The hidden world reached out and touched him. He would spend the rest of his life chasing that high.

## Crowley in the Golden Dawn

In 1898, Crowley was initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The order was something of a one-stop occult shop that placed a focus on ritual magic, like summoning.

Crowley entered the Golden Dawn's first or lower order. Above that was the second, and theoretically above that was the third order of secret chiefs: enlightened beings who might or might not be human.

From the start, Crowley stirred discord in the Golden Dawn. Among other things, he was accused of trying to introduce controversial sexual elements into the rituals.



The Golden Dawn harbored a conspiratorial group of Jacobites, who believed the Scottish Stuart dynasty was the rightful royal family of Britain. This belief was considered quite treasonous.

Importantly, Crowley didn't join the Golden Dawn just for occult enlightenment. He was also the eyes and ears of someone in the British government.

## Crowley's Personas and Travels

Crowley experimented with various personas during his fling with the Golden Dawn. He blew part of his inheritance on a run-down country estate in Scotland near Loch Ness. He also took to wearing a tartan and anointed himself Lord Boleskine. The Boleskine estate had a long connection to the supernatural, and Crowley used it as a sanctuary to practice ritual magic.

In London, he also assumed the persona of a Russian nobleman, Count Vladimir Svareff, and in 1900 he adventured off to Mexico under yet another name: Chevalier Isidor Achille O'Rourke. In Mexico, besides climbing volcanoes, he once more dabbled in political intrigue. Simultaneously—as Aleister Crowley—he was initiated into Mexico's Scottish Rite Freemasonry. He also found time to experiment with invisibility, a lifelong obsession.



**CROWLEY IN 1901**

## Another Encounter

Eventually, Crowley was back in England, approaching 30, married, and settling down as a family man. But another encounter with the occult changed all that.

In early 1904, Crowley and his new bride, Rose, visited Egypt, where they managed to spend the night inside the Great Pyramid of Giza. Crowley used the opportunity to summon his guardian angel. Rose, who usually took no interest in such things, went into a trance and proclaimed, “They are waiting for you.”

Crowley was skeptical but intrigued. A few days later, Rose entered another trance and stated that Horus, the hawk-headed god of ancient Egypt, was the expectant one.

A subsequent revelation—said to be from a spirit being named Aiwass—commanded Crowley to sequester himself in a room at noon on April 8. A voice would speak to him over his left shoulder, and he was to write down everything it said. The same routine repeated on April 9 and 10. The result was a work called *The Book of the Law*, the fundamental gospel of a new faith Crowley dubbed Thelema, meaning “Will.”

As holy books go, it's slim: 220 verses and around 7,500 words. The Egyptian goddess Nuit, her male consort Hadit, and Horus—in the form of Ra-Hoor-Khuit, the crowned and conquering child—all supposedly spoke through Aiwass. Crowley believed that he had been chosen to become the prophet of a new religion for a new age, the Aeon of Horus.

Crowley was convinced that Thelema would emancipate mankind from all limitations, especially moral ones. Even Crowley wasn't sure what really happened in Cairo.

Glory and acclaim did not follow. A disastrous attempt on the Himalayas' Kanchenjunga in 1905 left four members of Crowley's climbing team dead and him with the blame. A year later, his infant daughter with Rose perished tragically. They divorced, and Rose ended up in a mental asylum. Other women in the future would bear him additional children, but none brought lasting love and contentment.

## Crowley, 1907–1919

In 1907, Crowley formed his own initiatory secret society, the AA, which presumably stood for *Argenteum Astrum*, or Silver Star. Crowley kept the group small. From this point on, Crowley's intelligence connections mostly led back to the Naval Intelligence Division (NID).

Around this time, Crowley finished his first major occult treatise, simply titled *Magick* or *Book 4*. It incorporated most of the ideas that shaped his philosophy. Arguably, most important was the definition of *magick* as “the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with will.” Crowley believed science and spirituality could be reconciled through magic.

In 1910, Crowley met German occultist Theodor Reuss, who initiated him into another secret society, the OTO, standing for *Ordo Templi Orientis*, or Order of the Eastern Temple. The OTO aspired to be a general academy of occult sciences. Crowley saw it as a way to promote Thelema.

Theodor Reuss was a German spy, and the OTO was partly a cover for German intelligence. A man with Crowley's connections could be very useful to Berlin. By initiating Crowley into the OTO, Reuss probably believed that he was also enlisting him in Germany's service. And that's probably exactly what Crowley wanted him to think.

Meanwhile, Crowley's reputation in Britain continued to sour. That autumn in London, he organized a three-night extravaganza dubbed the Rites of Eleusis. The event was poorly received, and one press outlet called Crowley “one of the most blasphemous and cold-blooded villains of modern times.”

When the Great War came in 1914, Crowley didn't head off to the trenches. Instead, on October 31 of that year, he arrived in New York. He spent the next half decade in the United States writing, traveling, spying, taking drugs, and having sex with various partners. He also worked on magic, including sex magic.

Crowley had come to America with another mission, too: infiltrating and influencing the German propaganda and espionage apparatus in the United States, which was neutral in the war. Claiming to be an Irish nationalist—and using the connections he had through Theodor Reuss and the OTO—Crowley wormed his way into the Germans' confidence. He eventually returned to England in December 1919.



**CROWLEY IN 1919**

PHOTO BY ARNOLD GENTHE, N. Y.

## Crowley in the 1920s

Crowley spent most of the 1920s as an expatriate bumming around Italy and France. In Sicily, he started a spiritual commune—the Abbey of Thelema—but it fizzled. In 1923, Mussolini's new fascist regime kicked him out of Italy, partly on suspicion of espionage.

In France, his life reached a nadir. He was broke and struggling with heroin use, an addiction that had begun as treatment for chronic asthma. Meanwhile, British intelligence kept a discreet distance.

In 1929, Crowley was expelled from France, again on suspicion of espionage. But British intelligence at last reached out to help—somewhat. They dispatched him to Berlin, where he kept tabs on agents of the Irish Republican Army and had a front-row seat for the rise of Adolf Hitler.

Through the OTO, Crowley still maintained important connections among German occultists, some of them pro-Nazis and others anti-Nazis. All were potential sources of intelligence.

## Crowley in the 1930s and Early 1940s

Crowley finally returned to England in the early 1930s; his finances and public reputation were in tatters. In 1934, Crowley hoped to kill two birds with one stone by suing author Nina Hammett for libel. Hammett had written a book, *Laughing Torso*, which related scurrilous tales about his Sicilian commune, including the alleged sacrifice of an infant and the death of a follower. It was more bunk, but the defense paraded plenty of other damning evidence. Crowley came out of the trial defeated.

He made the acquaintance of an admiring 19-year-old woman named Pat Doherty. She later bore Crowley a son. Doherty had links to British intelligence. Her main job was to keep the aging magician reasonably happy and out of trouble. To do so, she participated in his continuing occult activities.

When war again reared its ugly head in 1939, Crowley's name appeared on NID's emergency list of persons eligible for special service. Crowley had a lifetime of occult knowledge, plus long experience in deceit and trickery, plus expertise in hypnosis and exotic drugs.

He was first directed to a section dealing with the interrogation of prisoners. His true activities during the war remain secret. The Soviets picked up rumors that he was organizing black masses and drug-fueled orgies among London's elite. He's also frequently credited with having a hand in a plot to lure Nazi official Rudolf Hess into flying to Britain in 1941.

## Crowley's Later Years

In his twilight years, Crowley still managed to meet new influential people. One was Gerald Gardner, who went on to found the neo-pagan Wiccan movement, based partly on Crowley's teachings. Another was American rocket scientist Jack Parsons, who for a time imagined himself as Crowley's magical son and successor. Through Parsons, Crowley made the indirect acquaintance of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard.

Eventually, as Crowley's health condition deteriorated, heroin deadened his pains, but it couldn't stave off the inevitable. On December 1, 1947, Crowley passed away.

## Reading

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Spence, Richard B. *Secret Agent 666: Aleister Crowley, British Intelligence and the Occult*. Feral House, 2008.

## Questions

- 1 If Aleister Crowley hadn't become an occultist, what do you suppose he might have become?
- 2 How much of Crowley's occultism do you think was sincere, and how much was a cover for his intelligence work?



# Popular Occulture

This chapter's topic is occult influence in popular culture. The chapter begins with L. Frank Baum's novel for children *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Then it moves on to other works, including *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, the play *The Blue Bird*, and other occult influences in film and music.

## Baum and the Occult

By far the most important influence in Baum's life was his mother-in-law Matilda Joselyn Gage. Gage was a pioneer feminist, abolitionist, and free thinker. She also believed that Christianity and all organized religion was part of a patriarchal plot to keep women down. Consequently, she reasoned that anything that Christianity condemned must possess some virtue. She sympathized with witches and reputedly considered herself one.

Despite her avowed hostility to religion, Gage's quest for spiritual fulfillment turned her to theosophy, a syncretic occult doctrine that combined Western and Eastern mysticism. It was also founded by a woman, Helena Blavatsky. Under Matilda Gage's influence, Baum also joined theosophy's ranks. Additionally, Baum was well acquainted with the esoteric concepts contained in Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry.

The most obvious manifestation of this in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is the titular character, who is, of course, a wizard. The story's action takes place in a parallel universe where the normal laws of time and physics don't apply. Powerful witches dominate, and the Land of Oz is populated with a variety of fairy-like beings. The Scarecrow is a kind of golem. The Tin Man is another magically animated being, and the Cowardly Lion is a talking animal.

The central character is Dorothy Gale, a humble Kansas farm girl. Once transported to Oz, from an occult standpoint, Dorothy's journey and ensuing adventures are easily recognizable as an allegorical quest for enlightenment. Along the way, she has obstacles to overcome, and she encounters beings and tools to help her find her way to the wizard, who supposedly will show her how to return home.

In the end, the wizard isn't her salvation. Instead, he turns out to be a fraud, the familiar face of the occult charlatan. The big reveal and great lesson is that the power to return home was Dorothy's all along.

The 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz* keeps this basic story, with a few changes. The best-known change is that the film's famous ruby slippers are silver in the book. But the biggest change is turning Dorothy's mystical journey into a dream. That wasn't the case in Baum's original. Oz was a real world, just not this world.





*"I am the Witch of the North."*

## ***Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass***

Two other relevant works are *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865, and its 1871 sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*. They're products of an eccentric Victorian scholar named Charles Dodgson, who wrote as Lewis Carroll. He was versed in occult matters. He belonged to the Society for Psychical Research, a group dedicated to the study of psychic and paranormal phenomena.

Alice's tale is that of a journey of initiation. She follows in the steps of Persephone and Orpheus to brave the perils of the underworld. Once underground, Alice is "led down the path of illumination" through a series of bizarre encounters, puzzles, and predicaments. Thanks to a magical drink and cake—stand-ins for sacramental bread and wine—she's able to adjust her size.

In the end, Alice finds herself on trial for her life before the maniacal Queen of Hearts. But she turns the tables by denouncing the queen and her minions as nothing more than a bunch of playing cards. In other words, she rejects false reality and asserts her will: the critical steps on the initiatory path. She has become illuminated to the true nature of things.



In the sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice is plunged into another parallel universe where the normal rules of physics and logic don't apply—a place beyond ordinary space and time. In the end, the great reveal of her initiatory journey is perhaps summed up in the last line of the story: “Life, what is it but a dream?” The meaning, arguably, is that all existence is an illusion shaped by our own internal desires and will.

### ***The Blue Bird***

Another example of occult-themed children's content is Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*. It began as a play in 1908 and later went through various screen versions. It tells the tale of a poor brother and sister, Tyltyl and Mytyl, who are dispatched by a dubious fairy to find the Blue Bird of Happiness.

This is another initiatory quest. After a journey, they eventually return home to find that the elusive bird was just sitting there the whole time. The takeaway message is a familiar one: We are the masters of our own reality—but it takes cutting through illusion and deception to see that.

## **H. P. LOVECRAFT**

H. P. Lovecraft's work, at its best, evokes truly disturbing ideas and imagery. However, Lovecraft wasn't an occultist. He professed himself a complete materialist, and he equated occultism with superstition.

## The Occult in Movies

Film is arguably the most occult of artistic mediums. The written word might conjure scenes and characters in the mind, but film brings them to life. It gives those characters voices and faces and projects them on a screen larger than life. It's a technological alchemy.

The first horror movie—and thus the first with a discernable occult theme—is *The House of the Devil* from 1896, by French film pioneer Georges Méliès. German studios and directors became major contributors to occult cinema during the 1920s, coming up with such films as *The Golem* and *Nosferatu*, the latter a thinly veiled version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Some real occultists, like Albin Grau, participated in *Nosferatu*'s production. One scene shows a document festooned with genuine esoteric writing and symbols.

An intriguing, if little-known, American example is Val Lewton's 1943 film *The Seventh Victim*, which concerns ritual sacrifice and a Satanic cult. More recent examples are 1968's *Rosemary's Baby*, allegedly made with the advice of Satanist consultants, and 1973's *The Exorcist*, which made demonic possession a household topic.

## Music and the Occult

Music, like film, also features signs of the occult. Wolfgang Mozart's 1791 opera *The Magic Flute* is an early example of occult influence in music. It tells the tale of an initiatory journey. Mozart, a Freemason, is believed to have encoded the opera's tale with Masonic symbolism as a veiled—that is to say, occult—attack on the anti-Masonic Hapsburg empress Maria Theresa.

Much later, during the 1960s, the face of the notorious British occultist Aleister Crowley shows up on the cover of the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, albeit along with a lot of other faces.

In the late 1960s, singer Mick Jagger and his Rolling Stones bandmates were hanging around with Crowley's friend Tom Driberg and a more recent devotee, filmmaker Kenneth Anger. The Stones produced the album *Their Satanic Majesties Request* in 1967, soon followed by *Beggars Banquet*, which led off with the iconic tune "Sympathy for the Devil."

The Doors songwriter and vocalist Jim Morrison was another Aleister Crowley fan. Crowley's visage appears on the band's 1970 album *13*. Another Crowley devotee, singer Daryl Hall of Hall and Oates, produced an entire album—*Sacred Songs*—inspired by Crowley's theology.

Yet another Crowley aficionado is Led Zeppelin singer and guitarist Jimmy Page. Ozzy Osbourne even wrote a song called "Mr. Crowley." The point here is that signs of the occult in music are quite easy to find.

### Reading

Dyer, Jay. *Esoteric Hollywood: Sex, Cults and Symbols in Film*. Trine Day, 2016.

### Question

- 1 Aside from the examples given in this chapter, where else can you see occult influence in literature, movies, and music?

## The Techno-Occult

**T**his chapter focuses on the present and future state of the occult. The occult isn't an artifact of the past. It exists today, and it will continue to do so. Wherever humanity goes, it will take occultism with it.

## Lucid Dreaming

Relevant to the present occult is a phenomenon termed *lucid dreaming*. This name was coined in 1913 by the Dutch psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden, but lucid dreaming has been around as long as humans have been dreaming. It refers to when a person dreaming realizes that they're dreaming. With this awareness—and some practice—they can arguably influence what happens in the dream.

Van Eeden and later researchers became interested in what lucid dreaming might tell us about the operation of the human brain and different states of consciousness. But dreams, lucid and otherwise, also hold important places in the occult realm. The term *oneirognosis* refers to knowledge or insight obtained from dreams. Oneiromancy refers to prophetic dreams.

From the standpoint of psychology, dreams are usually regarded as the random activity of a human brain detached from sensory input and influenced by recent events or chronic anxieties. But from the occult standpoint, nothing is random or meaningless, so dreams take on greater significance. They're a gateway to the hidden world.

## Coincidences

The term *coincidence* also deserves a close look. Coincidences are often equated with accidents, but they're not the same. Coincidences involve events that happen at or about the same time but for no apparent reason. The key word is *apparent*, meaning “visible.” The opposite term is *occult*. Thus, one argument goes, coincidences do have a connection; we just can't see it.

One person who explored this conundrum was the psychiatrist Carl Jung. Jung was deeply interested in the occult, and even dabbled in ritual magic. Around 1930, Jung coined the term *synchronicity* to describe a principle he believed underlay “meaningful coincidences.”

Jung drew some of his inspiration from the Chinese *I-Ching* system of divination. This system uses seemingly chance operations—usually coin tosses—to generate numbers that correspond to one of 64 oracular hexagrams.

Jung recommended *I-Ching* as a tool for psychoanalysis because he was convinced that it could reveal hidden aspects of the psyche. This drew him to look more closely at the relationship between the mental and the physical, and also drew him into an interesting collaboration with the Austrian physicist Wolfgang Pauli. Pauli is one of the pioneers of quantum theory, and he's credited with such concepts as quantum entanglement and observer effect.

Eventually, Pauli and Jung combined their theories into the so-called Pauli-Jung Conjecture. Its essence is that beyond the realms of mind and matter, there's a higher reality where the two become one, and things like synchronicity, or meaningful coincidence, originate.

## The Weaponization of Magic

After World War II, the US military and the newly created CIA initiated various mind-control programs, the biggest and most notorious of which was called MK-ULTRA. It used drugs, most notably LSD, and hypnosis to enhance interrogation and build a better spy. (That's as much as they were willing to admit.)

MK-ULTRA was supposed to be terminated in 1964. In reality, it was simply renamed MK-SEARCH, and it went on for another decade, perhaps longer. A subprogram, MK-OFTEN, dabbled in occult matters for a time. It enlisted fortune-tellers, mediums, Satanists, witches, and occultists of all sorts.

Around 1978, the US Army and the Defense Intelligence Agency initiated Project Stargate to investigate psychic events. Stargate involved so-called remote viewing, another name for the time-honored occult practice of astral projection. The viewer supposedly separated his or her consciousness from the body and was free to invisibly move across space and time, including into enemy high-security military facilities.

A small team of remote viewers continued until 1995, when the project was closed. A subsequent CIA report concluded that Stargate had turned up "nothing useful." Stargate also generated various side projects, one of which was chronicled in investigative journalist Jon Ronson's 2004 book *The Men Who Stare at Goats*.



## Techno-Occultism

Scientist Arthur C. Clarke famously noted that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” But there’s also the opposite proposition: that any sufficiently advanced form of magic is indistinguishable from technology. Today’s digital age has ushered in what some call techno-occultism. It includes algorithm-driven oracles, spell-casting programs, and phone apps such as Randonautica, which claims to use randomly generated coordinates—plus the user’s intent—to take people out of their “ordinary reality” and “attract strange things.”

Looming on the tech horizon are the prospects of artificial intelligence and transhumanism. Arguably, AI isn’t about building robots; it’s about creating life: the techno-occult version of homunculi and golems. Transhumanism, on the other hand, envisions the fusion of man and machine. This would entail the liberation of human consciousness from its prison of mortal flesh and its rebirth as an immortal digital being.

## Chaos Theory

Another idea deserving mention is chaos theory, which has its roots in modern mathematics. It posits that there are patterns even in the most random and disorderly systems. Nothing, then, is truly random, as the occult has told us all along. In chaos theory, everything is connected; a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil might cause a typhoon in Japan.

The 1970s saw the rise of chaos magic, an idea that has gained wide currency in occult circles. Chaos magic doesn’t concern itself with what’s objectively true because nothing is. All that matters is belief, or intent. Believe it, act accordingly, and results will happen. It’s also called results-based magic. As Aleister Crowley said long ago:

It is immaterial whether [things] exist or not. By doing certain things certain results will follow; students are most earnestly warned against attributing objective reality or philosophic validity to any of them.

One way to look at this is to consider reality a dream. Through illumination, we can wake up and take control of the dream. That, arguably, is the occult's great lesson.

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## Questions

- 1 Have you ever had an experience with an inanimate device that made you wonder if it might be alive?
- 2 Have you ever had an experience with synchronicity or a repetitive occurrence that left you perplexed?
- 3 After completing this series, does the occult seem more relatable or less relatable to you?









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