

# ASHÉ!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

Incarnation 7.2



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Frontcover: Lupercus Pagani

Backcover: "Voodoo Altars, New Orleans, LA" Sven Davisson

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# ASHÉ

## JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

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# The Horns of Asherah

Lupercus Pagani

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Alabaster crescents  
Torn from a sweaty brow  
Engorged Moon-Bull  
Spills rivers of white  
On charred meteorite

Scimitars of lion claws  
Draw red from oryx hide  
Young warriors kneel  
Bodies hot and wet  
Before the Mother of God

Serpent rises, star ascends  
Asherah washes her feet  
Soft pink on golden sand  
Doves alight on amber skulls  
She grasps in either hand

---

## Sage

Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán

---

In each place,  
purple flowers, fuzzed tongue,  
fragrance felt, rubbed, lifted to fingers,  
nose, nostrils, inhaled in, no other  
smell left possible. An overwhelming  
of senses. Wood chip, dirt, stump  
to sit on, clearing in the round,  
each four, water on rock,  
sizzle. Steam. Some of thin leaf, others  
round, pointed, a different way to collect  
water (counter-counter-clock-wise), bring  
it to root, hopefully still  
in soil. Dried for home  
cleansing, each foot lifted,  
then down the back, before  
entering, a gradient of genders, each  
place a space for us, left on altar  
for after bad visit, magick, time  
for battle/war, our aim a good one, no  
bowl or rug, basket, for the wall, used daily,  
before entering, leaving,  
the breaking of ties, new love,  
house

warming with sweat, peek of night sky,  
stars, or day sun, warming rocks  
fire, and the flap  
closes again; we are here within  
this womb. Each time we leave,  
we are born again, medicine  
deep within us, prayers,  
songs, in memory, Mother on our  
feet and faces. No Christian  
saviour greets us at the door.

Our Ancestors are the ground  
beneath us.



Sisters joining lesbian and gay student groups at the University of San Francisco protesting this Jesuit school's attempts to deny their existence on the occasion of its 125th. anniversary, October 1980. (Rink Foto from Soami Archive)



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## Angels-on-a-Pinhead

### History of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence

Sr. Soami

---



Sr. Mary Timothy Simplicity, SPI

On Holy Saturday, 1979 I donned a nun's habit for the first time. With two other 'gay male nuns' I sashayed out among the faithfully queer on the Castro and then trekked to the nude beach at Land's End to frolic with the pagan babies there assembled. At each location we were embraced and honored. "Good Afternoon, Sisters." "Happy Easter, Sisters." "Bless me for I have sinned, Sister." It was an afternoon of revelation and retribution.

Years before I had studied to be a priest with the Capuchin Franciscan friars until I was rejected when I confessed my repressed gay feelings. Then fifteen years later in the city of St. Francis in one playful afternoon of transgender dress-up, I reclaimed my earlier calling to the religious life.

In the next several months I, along with the other three 'founding mothers' of SPI (Sr. Vicious Power Hungry Bitch, Reverend Mother Abbess—now deceased, and Sr. Hysterectoria, aka, Agnes deGarron), recruited ten others—mostly Radical Faeries—to form an order of gay male nuns with a mission to promulgate joy and expiate guilt. By January 1980 we named ourselves The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. In the intervening three





Srs. Merry Peter and Bella daBall, SPI

decades we have become more inclusive with les/bi women, transpersons and even a heterosexual male, Sr. HedraSexual, taking the veil.

Our first official public appearance was a march and rally in SF against nuclear power on the first anniversary of Three Mile Island. Reverend Mother attended the planning sessions. Some organizers told us not to come. *We were politically incorrect. We were drag queens. We were not germane to the issues at hand.* (As if anyone on the planet could not be!)

Sr. Succuba had calligraphed our gothic SPI banner. Neighborhood Arts had sewn our first fourteen habits. At the convent we'd been making black and white pompons for days. The rally in Golden Gate Park would be just two blocks from the two convents that housed ten of us. So we gracefully showed up at the Civic Center, jumping in between the giant Mutant Sponges from the Farralon Islands and Haight hippies pushing a coffin marked Capitalism. En route we alternated cheerful pompon routines with a Rosary in Time of Nuclear Peril. It was a meditation on Five Sorrowful Nuclear Realities: the

U.S. Bombing of Hiroshima, the U.S. Bombing of Nagasaki, Karen Silkwood Killed in Oklahoma, The Chernobyl Disaster in Russia (added later), Three Mile Island in Harrisburg. The Ave Prayer in between implored the Great Mother to *protect us from the earth defilers*. On that first outing we established the range of our ministry, from silly satire to thoughtful spirituality.

The rest has been a colorful history quite often played out in the media both locally and internationally. We are sacred clowns in queer culture. We employ the sanctifying grace of camp humor as a survival strategy and for social and spiritual transformation. We support playing and praying in public. Our first charity work was with MCC to benefit Cuban refugees. It was a church hall bingo followed by a salsa dance party directed by Sr. UnityHarmony. Two days later we protested at USF at their 125th anniversary party that tried to deny the existence of the lesbian and gay campus groups at this Jesuit school. Two years later in 1982 we produced the first safe sex pamphlet, Play Fair. Srs. Mary Media, Roz Erection and Florence Nightmare, R.N., AKA, Bobbi Campbell the 1st AIDS poster boy, gently guided that accomplishment. And that year Sr. Boom Boom, running as 'nun of the above,' garnered 22,000 votes—almost becoming a SF Board of Supervisor.

For the first ten years I was known as Sr. Missionary Position. At our 10th anniversary party I altered my sisterly habits to become Sr. Missionary P. DeLight. In 2002 to honor the passing of a beloved faerie brother I became Sr. Iamosama DeLite, the Sodomite of the Most Holy and Beautiful Dove, Rumi Sufi Heart Now or for short Sr. So Am I.

In 1981 Mother Inferior Across the Abyss established the Order of Perpetual Indulgence in Australia. The Sisters there colonized New Zealand, Thailand and England. Toronto, Seattle, LA and Germany spontaneously combusted with our blessings or was it parthenogenesis? No, they definitely were not virgin births! Sr. X (RIP) of SF was the godmother of the Parisian Sisters. I believe England begat Scotland and we are not sure who infiltrated Uruguay and Colombia. In the past few years, Srs. Edith My Flesh and Helen Wheels at the Mother House have assisted in the formation of new houses in Portland, San Diego, Palm Springs and Las Vegas. Srs. Merry Peter and Mary

Timothy continue on with guiding SPI missions in Eureka, Arizona, Tampa, St. Louis and Sr. Ivanna Mann is organizing Chicago.

The Missionary Order of PI under the Reverend Mother Generalship of Sr. Clara CumPassionata operates from Des Moines and Kansas City thru Tennessee and on to Rhode Island. Founding Mother Banana Nut Bread (also Agnes) guides the NYC (dis)Order of Sisters. More than a hundred of our 500 sisters worldwide attended our June 2006 Conclave in Los Angeles to celebrate the Order's 10th anniversary there. Srs. Sparkle Plenty, NovaNilla and the rest of the Russian River Order are hosting the World SPI/OPI Conclave this September.

We combine social activism with glamour drag for public edification and personal enlightenment. We produce public parties. We lampoon political and clerical party lines. We celebrate queer diversity and community. We visit the sick. We shelter the homeless. We scatter the ashes of our dead.

Updated: Cinco deMayo 2008, June 17, 2008

3 Sisters Retreat House, Short Mountain Sanctuary, Liberty, TN



Sr. Soami

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## All Hallows Eve

Skadi meic Beorh

---

Jack O'Lantern, naked soul  
wand'ring through this horror eve  
while these children dance,  
bringing in the gathered sheaves,  
bringing out the worn and old  
for bonfire on old Emhain hill...  
perhaps someone should hold the dogs  
before they craze and kill

perhaps these little children here  
along the river, laughing still,  
laughing in their terror-fun,  
laughing long before the Sun  
shall turn away their chill,  
if it comes at all

Winter promises nothing,  
though the smallest children call

---

## *Embain Macha Dark Rain*

Skadi meic Beorh

---

Touch the speckled bird,  
call forth the ancient seed,  
rave high upon the hill,  
familiar come again  
to feed upon this darkness,  
to feed upon the need  
of comfort in this night,  
of succor in this dark rain...  
dark rain Macha night  
where old stones rest in heaps  
and silent children weep  
and nothing here is known...

---

# Hallow Men

Skadi meic Beorh

---

In olden times strange Rhymers roamed  
our countryside in search of joy,  
hidden 'hind their masks of straw  
bringing song and legend to  
people of the wood and wild  
folks of heaths and moors and wastelands.

No one knew their covered faces;  
voices odd, disguised.  
These brought healing to the people  
with their poetry and rhyming.  
These are yet with us today,  
in the lonely, hollow places...

Emhain Macha; Drum-na-Coosauin;  
Gort-na-Nark, the Burren hills.  
Glean-na-Gruagh, Stoneybatter  
where play children in cold rain.

*Celtic rule commenced by word of  
Bardic druid and the people.  
All afore our Saxons, afore  
Arthur, Uthr Dragonhead.*

*Cymbeline was king of Britain  
When Macc Nessa ruled  
Royal Branch of Ulster  
At the Dread Time of life  
When darkness fled at call of Star  
Watched for from the East  
Perhaps as far as Bharat,  
Or strange away as shamans...*

**Skadi meic Beorh** is the author of the story collection *Always After Thieves Watch* and the dictionary *Pirate Lingo*. His true home is Emhain Macha, the inspiration for this collection. He presently makes his home in Friendship, a Victorian borough in the East End of Pittsburgh.



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# Discerning Purpose

## Becoming Yourself Through Your Dreams

Dr. Jerrid P. Freeman & Angela Passarelli

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### ABSTRACT

Are you fulfilling a purpose that utilizes your natural interest and talents? What is your purpose? How do you identify your purpose? How do you live out your purpose? How do you sustain your purpose? These questions are answered and suggestions are given to not only facilitate your own journey but also to give you greater preparation to assist and encourage others.

### INTRODUCTION

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing. ... I want to know what sustains you from the inside, when all else falls away. I want to know if you can be alone with yourself; and if you truly like the company you keep in empty moments (The Invitation by Oriah Moutnam Dreamer).

Is it possible to have everything you ever dreamed of and still not be fulfilled? Quite possibility it is, and certainly so if the inner fabric of those dreams has not been explored. Further questions assist in understanding your dreams that lead to a life of purpose: Are the dreams I have my own? From where do

my dreams and aspirations originate? Am I fulfilling a purpose that utilizes my natural interests and talents?

With the amount of information expanding exponentially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the answers to these questions can easily become lost in an attempt to sift through competing stimuli - social expectations, financial opportunities, a search for fame and success, and materialistic attainment. It is easy to lose sight of dreams when time is not taken to assess current existence. The absence of purposeful reflection leads to a sense of meaninglessness or monotony about life activities. Yet, pausing to assess life can be emotionally charged. A realistic appraisal of oneself against whom one is meant to be is exciting and empowering, but potentially painful and distressing if one is unprepared for the answers he or she may find. The ultimate result of this soul searching is the ability to live out dreams with an attached purpose, which creates an otherwise unattainable sense of fulfillment in life. The result is not a destination, but rather a journey of identifying, living, and sustaining purpose over the course of a lifetime. Personal fulfillment is in direct proportion to a clear direction for which to strive—a life of meaning driven by purpose. This article defines purpose, discusses strategies to identify purpose on an individual level and provides guidance for living a life of purpose.

### **WHAT IS PURPOSE?**

The question that first must be answered to begin this journey of discovery — What is purpose? Purpose is a sense of understanding about one's interaction with the world in an interconnected and meaningful way. This sense could also be described as a peace about one's position in the world. Purpose provides direction in life and gives strength to dreams. Purpose cannot be described as a thing or even a state of being. Purpose is a sense of understanding to be obtained about life (Leider, 1997). It can be compared to love, which, has been written about for centuries through numerous illustrations, yet the age-old saying still holds true. You can only know it when you have it.

A unique purpose resides in each of us (Leider, 1997; McCarthy, 1992; Zohar & Marshall, 2000) and is not about what we expect from life, but what life expects from us (Jaworsk, 1998). Ultimately, the power of “purpose is knowing and using your natural gifts” (Leider, p. 113). Purpose must be acted upon to achieve fulfillment and contentment. It must become a way of life (Leider). Failing to live a purposeful life often leads to confusion, distress, stagnation, and ultimately despair (Parks, 2000). Yet, people are unable or unwilling to identify their purpose until a crisis forces them to take a deeper look. Once purpose is determined, a state of flow should follow. This state of flow is characterized by a feeling of peace and calmness with minimal fear and doubt (Jaworsk). Understanding the purpose of one’s life is compared to feeling at home. This means to feel “comfortable, that we belong, can be who we are, and can honor, protect, and create what we truly love” (Parks, p.34). Armed with this sense, one is able to navigate his or her own life journey.

The journey of life is vibrant and exciting when we move confidently in the direction of our dreams. However, if that journey is not guided by purpose, the destination can be quite disappointing. A sense of fulfillment cannot be derived from accomplishment alone; it can only be achieved by following a path guided by purpose (Jaworsk, 1998). This path often has a spiritual quality that surrounds an individual’s unique purpose for existing.

The spiritual qualities that pave the path along the journey toward purpose are developed through exercising spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence is the capacity to identify purpose and the courage to live it out. It is one of three human intelligences: Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), Emotional Intelligence (EQ), and Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Underling a healthy sense of self, spiritual intelligence is the foundation to a functioning intellectual intelligence and emotional intelligence. Spiritual intelligence is not equated to religious convictions, nor does being a person of religious faith guarantee spiritual intelligence (Zohar & Marshall). Rather, spiritual intelligence stems from a deep-rooted system of values and beliefs that could, but does not have to, embody religion.

Society suffers a dreadful poverty of spiritual intelligence. Our society

is infested with the immediate, the material, and the selfish manipulation of things and experiences. We misuse our relationships and our environment just as we misuse our deepest human meanings (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Spiritual intelligence helps us identify who we are and guides us in becoming who we want to be (Zohar & Marshall). “Spiritual intelligence calls for multiple ways of knowing and for the integration of the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of work in the outer life of work in the world” (Vaughan, 2002, p. 16). In other words, understanding your spirituality moves one toward a greater understanding of reality by bridging the gap between personal perceptions and actual reality (Palmer, 1998).

To develop spiritual intelligence one must first be self-aware. Zohar & Marshall (2000) provided that in order to develop spiritual intelligence we must be strongly committed to the motivations that lie at the deepest core of our being. We must continually renew our commitment to those motivations through critical reflection and anticipation of future obstacles. By anticipating the future, multiple pathways can be identified. Those who are spiritually intelligent choose pathways that most closely align with their deepest motivations. Expressing this level of spiritual maturity assists in living a meaningful life because it defines an interconnected understanding of individual purpose.

While developing spiritual intelligence is a good first step, the change necessary to live a life of purpose is a much more complex process. Whereas the focus should lie in developing greater meaning to all of life’s questions, fear often creates paralysis in the change process. The issues and questions that elicit fear must be addressed. They will not go away unless they are exposed (Palmer, 1998). Not facing the fear to answer life’s questions is like sweeping dirt under a carpet. The dirt is still there, it is just hidden for the time being. Honesty, awareness, and courage are essential in order to be open to experiencing life from a different perspective and not seeking refuge in what is comfortable (Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

### **How do you identify purpose?**

So, you might ask, how does one identify their purpose? Identifying

purpose begins with the premise that a unique purpose resides within every individual. Individual purpose cannot be defined externally by other people or by personal expectations for what we think our purpose should be. Only you can identify your purpose and attach meaning to what happens to you (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Others can assist by providing feedback or affirmation, but considering the opinions of others over your own desires may draw dangerously close to “just people pleasing” (McCarthy, 1992, p. 4). Throughout our lives we are constantly swayed, moved, enticed, compelled, and persuaded (consciously and unconsciously) to believe and respond in certain ways (Parks, 2000). Finding your own purpose and acting on that purpose allows you to minimize any undesired external influence and places you at the helm.

Purpose lies at the natural core of human existence and is understood by listening to the questions life asks. Discovering purpose is an on-going and dynamic process that requires life to be examined in new ways. Have you seen the movie *City Slickers*? If you have not, it is a story of three friends who leave their families and daily routines to look for the true purpose in their lives. To accomplish this task, they travel to the wide-open spaces of a Dude Ranch where they are charged with the task of moving a herd of cattle across the wilderness. The experience seemingly becomes their worst nightmare, evoking pain, discomfort and fear. The person who is their cattle drive leader is a gentleman who is as rough and rugged as he is old; yet has a presence of wisdom about him. He tells the friends that their purpose in life is right before them. He holds up his index finger to signify that it is one thing. The three men struggle throughout the trip to discover that one thing, as the leader refuses to tell them. They finally discover near the end that one thing is not one thing at all. That one thing is different for every person and is clear only through an internal search of one’s deepest thoughts, emotions, and dreams. As this story shows, the search for purpose has no clearly defined path, yet it is clear that each individual must engage in a journey of self-discovery or authorship.

Even though a specific map does not exist for finding your purpose, some

internal and external signs emerge to provide guidance along the journey. The challenge is to recognize and follow those signs as they are presented. Everyone must write his or her own life story; however, certain steps provide guidance along the way.

### **Step One – Muster the courage.**

**Necessities:** Address your fears; Release control; Open your heart.

**Questions to ask:** Am I ready? Why search? What am I afraid of?

### **Step Two – Create space for reflection and “inner work.”**

**Necessities:** Remove yourself from your usual surroundings; Find an expressive outlet (journal; nature; prayer; etc)

**Questions to ask:** Where is a place I feel safe to be myself? Where can I be vulnerable? How do I best express my innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires?

### **Step Three – The Quest.**

**Necessities:** Listen to the questions life asks you; Retain your courage and faith.

**Questions to ask:** Who am I now? From where does my identity come? What fulfills me and why? What patterns emerge in times of true happiness? What does my life say about me and what I value? What thinking got me where I am today? Am I doing what I am called to do?

The first step, mustering the courage, seems simple. But unrealistic expectations for and lack of commitment to living a life of purpose can be the greatest cause of failure. It does not require great courage to believe that “each person has a natural reason for belonging,” which, when developed into one’s purpose, supplies great “energy and direction” (Leider, 1997, p.1). Whereas the energy and direction that is gained through living a life of purpose is well documented and enticing, the fear of change and risk is extremely debilitating in our journey for purpose and meaning (Palmer, 1998). At first the thought of change is exciting, while effort to make the change may be too great or overwhelming to pursue. The truth is that purpose is greater than we are, which puts it beyond our control. Living out our purpose often requires risk-taking and extreme faith (Leider), which causes most people great discomfort. Fear of what is unknown, unlikely, or seemingly irrational creates limitations. Without courage and faith the journey towards purpose and meaning will likely be thwarted. Not only will personal fears and doubts creep in, but also outsiders will also cast uncertainty on life changes. A biblical story illustrates this type of faith, sometimes even irrational faith, which is necessary to take on such an endeavor. The story goes that a group of disciples were on a boat in a large body of water when Jesus walked on water to meet them. Witnessing such an extraordinary event, the disciples were fearful and disbelieving. One of the disciples, Peter, asked Jesus to prove it was indeed Him by allowing one of the disciples to walk on the water as proof. Jesus invited him out of the boat and Peter walked on the water even though he knew it was physically impossible. While this first step took great faith and courage, he began to lose faith as the waves swelled around him. Without faith to bolster courage, Peter began to sink. The wisdom in this parable is that not only will starting this journey require great faith and courage, but that very faith and courage will be tested in various ways over time. The waves in the story represent daily obstacles that challenge one’s ability to live a purposeful life. Strategies to maintain conviction about the search for purpose are essential to sustain courage throughout the journey.

The second step, creating space for reflection, paves the road to self-



awareness. Reflection is a solitary practice in which one looks deep into one's own life. Some environmental factors enhance the ability to search internally. First, life should be clear of clutter so what really matters can be clearly identified (McCarthy, 1992). Minimalist living prevents confusion from impurities that cloud the mind. Moving away from what is familiar - sometimes including family and location - allows you to be who you want to be and not who others expect you to be. It also makes it easier to critically examine one's daily environment in order to refocus about the many roles you currently hold. This often leads to a second strategy for creating space for reflection, instituting a personal paradigm shift. In order for a shift to occur, currently held paradigms must be understood. Havener (1999) suggests that the best way to do this is to examine the roots of personal beliefs. The intention of this process is to change one's way of thinking. Meaning cannot be found thinking the same way that did not produce clarity in the past. In fact, prior ways of thinking produce current reality. In addition, many people need to give their souls time to catch up with their minds and bodies so that it can become the guide and not vice versa (Leider, 1997). Once the optimal space and mental framework is found, experiment with the type of reflection that is best most effective. Some people write in a journal, perform yoga or other exercises, engage in prayer, play or listen to music, or enjoy nature. Certainly, there are as many ways to reflect, as there are humans to do it. The key is to determine which type or combination of types works best for you personally.

The third step towards purpose and meaning is The Quest itself. The quest is an investigation of your inner-most thoughts, feelings, and desires, which is completed by asking questions of "why?" and "what?" This process may be guided or it may be self-directed. The questor must keep asking why until an "Aha!" moment is reached (Havener, 1999). In an "Aha!" moment, that which was once unclear becomes obvious. An example may be an optical illusion where a group of people looks at the same picture and some in the group see an old lady while others see a young woman. The same occurs in our lives, where the picture at which we look does not change, but see our

lives differently. The questioning process is pivotal because the development of meaning is not a black and white process with a clear beginning and end. Rather, it is a fluid formulation of dreams and purpose. The answers to these questions are derived from inner compass, or intuition, and lead us to individual purpose (Leider, 1997). However, a final destination is never reached. As individuals change and grow, their structures of meaning about life progressively evolve (Daloz, 1999). This process brings perspective closer to reality. Asking why questions also raises your spiritual intelligence. It will help you be more reflective, understand your motivations, reach beyond yourself, take responsibility, become more self aware, be more honest with others and yourself, and become more courageous (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Consider the musings of a young infantry officer who serves in the war in Iraq:

While walking to my tent the other day, I came across something that made me freeze in my tracks. In front of the battalion supply office was parked a “gator,” one of the six-wheeled carts that we use for quickly carrying small loads of supplies around camp. In the back of the gator were six cardboard boxes, carefully stacked upon one another. They were each neatly labeled with a name, rank, and SSN, and sealed shut.

Three of the boxes belonged to a Navy corpsman who was wounded in a firefight. Fortunately for him, the wound was not life threatening. However, the other three boxes belonged to a Marine who was killed in a separate attack.

All of the worldly possessions that young man carried to Afghanistan fit in those boxes; books, photographs, and letters from family and friends, in addition to combat gear and supplies. Soon, those three boxes would journey around the world and be delivered to a bereaved family. As I stood there absorbing the impact of that scene, I prayed

silently for that Marine and his loved ones.

I also thought about my life. What would be in my three boxes? Would those items really represent who I am and what I stand for? ...“Am I living my life the way I want, or more importantly, the way I should?” “Have I told those whom I love just how much they mean to me? (Turner, 2005, p. 1).

This young man was asking the deep questions of a quest for purpose. If your life were packed into three small boxes, what would the contents be? What would you *want* the contents to be? If the answers to these questions are not the same, you have some inner work to do. These tough questions – and the truthful responses - move you along the journey towards self-awareness, purpose, and a life filled with meaning. The journey is sometimes arduous and there are no shortcuts to finding purpose (Leider, 1997). It can only be found through questioning, inquiry, and practice (Vaughan, 2002). The process must include a search for connection, pattern, order, and significance (Parks, 2000), the results of which must be aligned in behavior. If you have difficulty creating your own line of questioning in the quest, follow Ruderman and Ohlott’s (2002) suggestions for developing personal understanding.

1. Work on developing self-awareness.
  - a. Prioritize values and understand personal likes and dislikes
  - b. Foster self awareness of values and priorities
  - c. Visualize yourself five years from now
  - d. Create an actual image of the future.
2. Assess your behaviors, choices, and trade-offs
3. Take action to align your values with your daily life
4. Believe in yourself
5. Get support (p. 27).

These suggestions relate to the mentality of a quest and demonstrate the

various avenues for developing greater self-awareness. The journey towards self-awareness is continually ongoing and often occurs through significant events and life changes. Many authors and TV talk show hosts have made millions assisting others in this journey, but what it really amounts to is a personal focus on your inner self and the answers to the questions life presents to you. Have the courage to ask the tough questions, develop avenues to alter your perspective, and engage in the quest to identifying purpose. Once you begin to understand your purpose and meaning, you must place your faith in it and begin acting on that “one thing” that is the compass for your life (Parks, 2000).

### **HOW DO YOU LIVE OUT YOUR PURPOSE?**

Jaworsk (1998) notes that it is better to know whom you are than where you are going. Many individuals approach life from the wrong vantage point; they try to find out who they are after they decide where they are going. Media specialists in today’s society give generalized advice about life’s direction. While this one-size-fits-all approach does help a large segment of society find financial self-sufficiency, it is dangerously narrow and stifles the type of individual expression that fuels purpose which can lead to a life lacking a sense of purpose and meaning. Therefore, your sense of purpose should be your primary source of direction in life. With each step toward purpose, your destination will become clearer.

Life’s activities are not inherently meaningful; rather, individuals bring meaning to life’s activities. To achieve fulfillment, purpose must underlie the attachment of meaning to life’s activities. Life activities are more than simply job functions. Life activities also include interactions with family, volunteer activities, recreational activities, and the way money is spent. Living out a purpose means aligning all things in our lives such that purpose and meaning are seamless in all activities. Yet even with a complete life based on meaning and purpose there will be ups and downs (Parks, 2000). These valleys and

peaks can be harnessed by developing a “creative tension” in life, rather than stress (Leider, 1997). Creative tension is achieved by living life fully and well while utilizing your strengths and weaknesses (Palmer, 2000). Living life fully also means appreciating the present and making the most of current opportunities. The future is created at each present moment (Jaworski, 1998).

One strategy for achieving creative tension is to allow dreams, goals, and purpose (life mission) to merge with one’s career mission (Jeffries, 1998). It is easy to become discontent, confused, and unhappy when your career lacks very little connection to what brings meaning to life. Abraham Maslow in his 1970 book, *Motivation and Personality*, coined the phrase, “The Jonah Complex” to describe those who out of a fear of success run away from their real calling in life. “The Jonah Complex” references a parable in which Jonah refused to follow his life’s purpose. Therefore, a whale swallowed him until he decided to fulfill his purpose. No one will likely receive an obvious response to not following purpose, but results that are less obvious are sure to occur. The decision to ignore life’s calling through vocation will limit one’s “capabilities for tremendous achievement for changing the world” (Jeffries, p. 30).

Whereas some individuals face a magnitude of competing dreams and goals, others have specifically identified that which they hope to accomplish in life. We propose a technique to identify life goals and dreams that will lead to actions that will discern a life of purpose. This technique is also helpful in establishing priorities, and as McCarthy (1992) notes, managing time. The first step is to create a list of things you want to accomplish before you die. List as many items as possible at the time and leave blanks at the end of the list for things thought of at a later time. Also leave room at the sides to alter or change the goals at any time. Now, think about your list. Does each goal really matter? Do some conflict with one another? The goals listed do not have to be necessarily attainable, but should have a direct association with your ultimate purpose in life. The second step is to make another list of your weekly and monthly activities. Do any of your interests, hobbies, or

responsibilities conflict with an item on your list? If a regular activity doesn't give you meaning or align with your purpose and goals in life, why are you doing it? If activities do not correspond with your goals and purpose, either stop doing that activity or add a goal to your list. The third step is to prioritize all the items on the list. This prioritizing process should not set goals in stone, but rather serve as a guide for those items that provide the greatest sense of meaning and fulfillment at the time. As you develop as an individual, priorities will shift and change. Do not be afraid to alter goals to effectively manage all of your dreams (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). It is also important to realize that some goals overlap, some goals conflict with one another, and some goals require more time than others. There will be times that one goal must be chosen at the expense of another. It is valuable to think about that possible conflict before being faced with the decision. Lastly, regularly look at your list. Carry it with you or have it in a place you will look often. Goals should drive and motivate daily activities so that each day brings meaning and fulfillment to life as one moves toward purpose.

Daily attainment of purposeful goals can be tricky. Some goals are abstract and need to be broken down into tasks that can actually be accomplished, while others may be clearly defined. Either way, actionable items must be developed for each goal. Actionable items are micro-goals that are specific and timely. They are immediate stepping-stones toward a long-range goal. For example, if being a good father is a life goal, multiple steps must be taken before that goal is realized. In order for action items to be successful, a clear purpose must tie them together. Keep in mind your three boxes and don't let others derail your quest towards purpose and meaning.

This whole exercise is about putting dreams in writing, making them real, and striving towards that goal. Here are some motivating words from someone who used the list:

Here I am, following the only dream I could put into words.  
Remember when we listed what we hoped to accomplish in  
our lives? It feels so refreshing to mark one off. Like nothing

I ever imagined. I'm really doing it. I'm making it happen.  
Can you believe it?" (Vence, 2003).

That is what it is about. The young woman who spoke these words had a dream of joining the Peace Corp and going to South Africa. With little support from family and friends and personal financial instability, she felt it was a calling to accomplish with faith and hope. She struggled with the decision for over two years and finally went against many family and friends, placing other dreams aside to accomplish this one major dream. The refreshing feeling this individual had comes not only by marking one item off of the life list of goals, but also by just striving towards it and making progress. It is equally as rewarding to help others strive towards their own life purpose. This same person put it best when she said, "I don't remember what stopped me from seeing this simplicity before...I was so absorbed in the problem that I never saw the promise" (Vence, 2003).

Ultimately the way to live out your purpose is through your actions. Dreams and goals alone do not give meaning to life. Life develops meaning through the *actions* that lead to achievement of goals (Leider, 1997). Purpose is embodied in various goals and dreams, each of which competes for your time, energy, and talent. A system for deciding what is the most important must be developed, keeping in mind that your goals are not your purpose in life (McCarthy, 1992). Therefore, do not just pursue every goal. Instead, think through each one carefully. This includes determining the overall consequences of realizing the goal. Will it interfere with your other goals and dreams? Once a strategy for pursuing your dreams and goals is developed, time management becomes essential (McCarthy). If a great amount of time is dedicated to just one goal, the others might suffer. All your primary goals and dreams must be balanced. Goals and dreams are meant to be freeing, not constraining; therefore, you must find a happy medium in organizing and planning your accomplishments. Think of it this way: time is your greatest resource. If you are following your dreams and goals, you are investing your time wisely. If you are not following your dreams and purpose in life, then you



are wasting the most precious resource that you have. You must also remember that the decisions you make will not always be simple. In fact, choosing to act on your purpose may be more difficult than choosing other options. Finally, realize that you may have to break old habits, which is extremely challenging. Not only will you test your personal discipline, but also others will try to keep you like your old self. Perseverance and commitment are crucial. The key is to focus on what you can do and not on what you are not doing.

Another technique for identifying priorities is to keep a gratitude journal or daily record of things for which one is grateful. Patterns will emerge to demonstrate the values, priorities and activities that you spend the most time on in life (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). This assists in determining whether your purpose coincides with how you spend your time. Another idea that you can use to be accountable for purposeful living is a daily activity audit. Make a list of everything you do in your day-to-day life. This list should be extensive. Compare it to your purpose to determine whether or not each activity fulfills your purpose. If an activity does not fulfill your purpose in at least an indirect way, then it is nothing more than noise that should be eliminated. This is also a place to look for gaps. In what ways are you missing the call to fulfill a purpose on this earth?

### **HOW IS PURPOSE SUSTAINED?**

Once your purpose is found and you begin making decisions that fill your life with meaning, how do you sustain that sense of meaning? The truth is that there are more obstacles to maintaining meaning than there are facilitators. Personal obstacles are often negative self-talk, fear, laziness, and lack of faith (Jeffries, 1998). Other personal characteristics that can hamper your spiritual intelligence and ability to act on your purpose in life are materialism, expediency, self-centeredness, and lack of commitment (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Many of the experiences we have each day pull our focus from our larger purpose (Leider, 1997). Family expectations, societal norms,

and organizational cultures are all covert elements that thwart our quest of meaning (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). The path is not easy; in fact it is likely to be painful. We will still have problems, pains, and failure. The true difference in living a purposeful life is in how you respond to those issues (McCarthy, 1992). While the road traveled towards your purpose and a life filled with meaning will be difficult, having your daily actions out of alignment with your purpose has even greater mental and physical costs (Leider; Palmer, 2000).

The key to overcoming these obstacles is to not let your life's purpose be derailed by confusion or setbacks. Making meaning of our failures, disappointments, and/or tragedies bolsters our sense of purpose rather than hurts it. We must constantly remind ourselves that we learn through failure. We all have fears, particularly of failure, but we do not have to be controlled by our fears (Palmer, 1998). Being able to accept and guide your own life circumstances allows you to make sense of failure and the tragedies that occur in your life (Baxter-Magolda, 2001). In fact, our tragedies and failures can be the greatest way to find renewal in dreams and purpose in life. Hardships are often integral to the journey towards greater meaning and purpose. Challenges beyond our control “strip the ego of the illusion that it is in charge” and allows us to be vulnerable enough to find out what is truly inside our hearts (Palmer, 2000, p. 18).

Continuous renewal helps individuals find ways to maintain focus on the purpose in life. Reflect daily and develop ways to center yourself and your actions on your purpose. Appreciate the simple moments in life. In essence, stop to smell the flowers as a reminder of the simple things that affect the daily lives of those around us.

One of the most effective ways to provide renewal that sustains purpose is through mentors and encouragers. Find a close friend, colleague, or even family member with whom to share your purpose and dreams. This person then becomes an encourager, offering challenge and support to continue pressing forward toward your purpose in life. Make sure these mentors are not people who can become obstacles to achieving your goals and dreams

in the future. Lastly, challenge yourself in every interaction with others to not be a dream crusher. It is crucial to help one another find purpose and support efforts to obtain the goals deemed meaningful. Encouraging others and seeing what motivates them to pursue their purpose in life despite all the obstacles can be extremely inspiring. We have so much to offer one another.

Just imagine how refreshing a world of purpose-seeking citizens would be! Certainly there would be much more collaboration, peace, and good will. The search for purpose allows everyone to find his or her unique niche in this world. Once defined, purpose drives us to fulfill that niche such that we enrich not only our own lives, but also those of others. When the heart's longing is met, the journey is clearly worthwhile.

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## Muse

Sven Davisson

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*Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,  
Sing, Heavenly Muse...*

Dark fusion of Erato and Ganymede,  
a fire-sorcerer summoning chthonic forces  
from places not known to man,  
Kaotic emotion splits great fissures  
on its way to the surface.  
Rock transforms to orange lava  
in the Master's forge.  
I long to join him in sacrifice  
to crash against that sea  
to thunder and hiss in steam,  
then lie black and spent  
once again immovable rock.

Inspiration catches the senses  
as distinctive as the scent of diesel—  
petro-lust of decaying flesh

echoing strength across millennia.  
The fuel to the engine of creativity  
sets spark combusting the soul.  
Strong, young, favored prince,  
volcanic blacksmith at Hel's forge,  
his cup is a fiery crucible  
in which self melts  
to its constituent parts.  
Heat separates the ego  
from the emptiness.  
There is no god  
in the silent space  
between mortals and eternity.

Sweet flag moves above the water,  
Kalamos' sorrowful lament.  
The water reed sees its reflection  
a reversed twin rippling  
in answer to wind's whisper.  
I hunger for that inspiration  
born in the furnace of another.  
The soft counterbalance of flesh  
I rest my head on the chest of the Muse  
a lyre cradled in strong arms.

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# Memorial for the Woman Who Poured (Matthew 26:6-13)

Diana R. Thompson

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I offended this world's rude rules and codes  
For Him who carried the heaviest of loads.  
For Jesus the Christ, the Messiah and my friend,  
I committed deeds others did not comprehend.  
To a former leper's home, I had to go  
Shrewdly yet peacefully, so no one would know.  
My alabaster box was heavy and rare.  
Numerous thieves would sieze it, if it was bare.  
So I hid it under old hides and rags.  
People ignored my precious, bountiful bags.  
Before I arrived, a meal had been served.  
The Prince of Peace was easily observed.  
The Man who loved me more than anyone can  
Would leave this place soon in a most untimely ban.  
But He was much more than bone, flesh and skin.  
He was The Hallowed God and my Blessing Kin.  
Still I had to do more than just accept His fate.  
I had hope that some day I would celebrate.  
I removed the lid and poured the ointment  
Anticipating His torturing appointment.  
His irate disciples questioned my purpose.  
(Their anger was often an unneeded surplus.)  
The ointment could have been sold for much money



To help many poor souls buy milk and honey.  
But Jesus told them not to disturb my mind.  
(This Master is loving, gentle and kind.)  
I trusted and obeyed and did what I could  
Then The Bright and Morning Star called my work “good.”  
I had prepared His body for interment  
But the borrowed tomb would not be permanent.  
He left that enclosure on the third day  
To love, guide and enjoy all who will obey.  
Each morning, I wake and compose a joyous hymn.  
All day long, I thank and praise only Him.

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## Undercurrent

Raymond Yeo

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I was unknowingly baptized into Catholicism and officially “confirmed” at the age of 13. During that time, I considered myself a devout Christian. It never occurred to me that I might be taking my faith too seriously until my oldest brother caught me alone in my bedroom, at the impressionable age of 14, with my mother’s rosary. I’d been counting off the beads, mumbling each *Hail Mary* and *Our Father* under my breath when the door suddenly burst open. “You’re such a freak,” he proclaimed, looking away. I felt humiliated, crouched there, with the door wide open and the pearly white cross in my hands. I guess I was engaged in a kind of masturbation—secretly hoping I’d be struck blind like Saint Paul, on the dusty road to Damascus, and have the mysteries of the Divine revealed to me in vision.



It was my best friend, Dave, who served as a ferryman in the wake of my traditional Catholic upbringing. We’d become close friends soon after our graduation from high school. He was six feet tall and weighed in at a slender 130 pounds. His red hair was short and spiked. He listened to alternative music and idolized Andy Warhol.

Our first real bonding experience happened in the summer of 1984. It was a windy August evening. We took lawn chairs to the roof of his mother’s condo to watch the onset of a particularly apocalyptic storm. “There’s something I’ve been wanting to tell you,” I said, my heart pounding, “but it

never seemed to be the right time to bring it up.” My voice was shallow and unsteady.

Dave looked out at the massive ceiling of purple and gray. The gusts of wind had little or no effect on his spiked hair.

“So I figured I’d just go ahead and say it...”

We glanced at each other. I could see the same angst in his pale, narrow face. I took a deep breath and choked out the words: “I’m gay.”

There was a long, split-second pause before he spoke up. “That’s funny,” he said, “so am I.”

Coming out back then was a lot like surfing in shark infested waters. Pope John Paul II was at the height of his influence, Ronald Reagan was president, and the CDC had only just labeled the mysterious and deadly immuno-suppressing syndrome spreading among gay men in California and New York.

During that period of my life, I looked to the Church for comfort. I prayed to Jesus for an answer. *How could God make me this way and then tell me I’m wrong?* I prayed to Saint Jude, “the patron Saint of lost causes.”

But it was a lost cause. Over time, I felt increasingly disconnected from an organization that could only condemn me. I’d become a misfit among God’s chosen, left to drown in the deep end of the baptismal fount.



It was Dave who turned me on to the existence of Magick, during the height of the New Age movement in the late 1980’s—the time of the big “Harmonic Convergence.” His orange-red hair had grown to his shoulders and his interest in music had gone from *Depeche Mode* and *The B-52’s* to *Enya* and *Yani*. He informed me that the *k* in “Magick” was added deliberately, to separate it from the practice of sawing showgirls in half and pulling rabbits from a top hat. The most basic tenet of Magick is the innate ability to create one’s reality by way of ritual and purposeful visualization.

During an especially long walk in one of Pittsburgh's stately parks, on a sunny fall afternoon, he'd confided in me that the basic premise of Magick had been revealed to him by a New Age entity named Lazarus.

As we strolled along the dirt trail, kicking up yellow and red leaves, Dave explained that matter—the physical world—doesn't really exist. He gestured at our surroundings, at the perfect blue sky, and said: "It's all just an illusion held together by our beliefs."

This was before anyone had heard of *quantum physics*—and long before *The Matrix* movies. "If the Earth isn't real," I said in response, "how can I walk on it?"

He could see the skepticism in my eyes right off. "Everything is essentially made up of energy," he explained, "including our planet."

"This sounds a lot like Plato's *shadows in the cave* allegory."

Dave considered the idea for a moment. "Sort of," he went on, "but, what Plato had wrong is *we* are the light source that creates the shadows, not some all-powerful creator."

"So then where does God fit into the New Age?"

Dave stopped on the path. His hands were shoved into his jean pockets. "The best way to explain, I think, is just to say *we all get what we expect when we die*. Good Christians do go to heaven and Buddhists keep coming back."

"Where does that leave atheists?"

He thought again, shrugged. "Nowhere, I guess."

My first stab at Magick came about in 1988, after a bitter breakup with a guy who'd been stealing money from my bank account to afford dates with other men. I was 26, and more-or-less ready to accept responsibility for my tiny part in the larger universe. Dave agreed to help.

We sat facing each other, on the thread-bare carpet of my South Side apartment. A wisp of smoke trailed up from the ceramic bowl Dave had placed between us, rising up in gentle curls from the burning sage to an open window.

"Now write out three or four of the most important qualities you're

looking for in another man.” Dave said the words in a deliberate, no-nonsense tone. He was nothing if not serious. “And then fold the paper twice over.”

I used a thick, indelible marker. On a blank white page, I wrote *compassion, loyalty, and generosity*. The red ink soaked the paper like blood on white linen. I folded it once, then again. I held it out to Dave but he remained still.

“Now touch it to the candle and place it in the bowl.”

I did—I placed the corner of the paper to the tip of the white flame. The paper turned black and curled in on itself. I dropped it into the bowl. It flared and disappeared in the orange-yellow tongue as a much larger trail of white smoke rolled into the air.

“You can say something now, if you want.” Dave didn’t look at me. He kept his soft, blue eyes focused on the bowl. He brushed a long strand of hair from his forehead and used a thin twig to poke at the smoldering embers.

I was feeling brave, so I spoke up: “I am aligned with the Abundant Universe. I am the perfect incarnation of love, intimacy, and friendship. With this power, I call to me the perfect relationship: A lover, a friend, a life-partner who is compassionate, loyal, and generous.”

Dave listened to the words, patiently, with his hands resting in his lap. We both watched the bowl. As the flame winked out, it spat and fizzled and gave off one last puff.

“Well, that’s it,” Dave said, standing up. He brushed his palms against the sides of his jeans. “Good luck.”

I had my first date with my life-partner, Mark, two months later. We’ve been together for 18 years.

Of course it wasn’t that simple. Maintaining a committed relationship takes more than Magick. Cinderella and the Handsome Prince may have lived happily ever after, but they still had to contend with the wicked stepmother (my side of the family, not Mark’s).

With that said, I can’t deny I’m in love with a man who sends “save Darfur” letters instead of holiday cards, who flew to Berlin on a moments notice to be at his brother’s film debut, and who, more recently, helped pay

my way through college.



I began practicing witchcraft well into the 1990's—the result of Dave's magickal influence combined with an already-existing fascination with the occult. I used bits and pieces of New Age philosophy in consort with Goddess-based nature religions. I called upon the Horned God of nature and aligned myself with the Earth Goddess.

Mark, on the other hand, didn't believe in any of it. He was (and still is) an atheist to the core. "If we create our reality," he'd say, "it's only because we seek out what we expect."

Of course there's no way to prove any of it. The problem with Magick (and God, I suppose) is that it requires *faith*. When push comes to shove, we're all just groping in the dark, hoping we'll find something real. Which we never do. I know this for a fact, but it never stops me from searching for the philosopher's stone.

This zealous search for evidence often waylays me. But, if Dave was a ferryman in my spiritual voyage, Mark was a lifeguard. And through his own brand of scientific reasoning, he keeps my spiritual adventure from going off the deep end. The most obvious example being our vacation to New Orleans in the late 1990's:

I was on a pilgrimage of sorts. Ever since I'd read *The Witching Hour* by Anne Rice, I'd been drawn to the mystique of New Orleans. I wanted to see the French Quarter in the pale moonlight, to traipse around the narrow alleyways and discover the history of the occult in the old, turn-of-the-century city. Mark agreed to the trip strictly for the warm climate, spicy shrimp, and authentic jazz.

After just two days in the city, we'd taken the "Haunted History" tour of the French Quarter and the "Voodoo and Witchcraft" tour of the outlying cemeteries—with no sign of genuine mysticism. But I was on a mission. Next stop: *Esoterica Occult Goods*, on Rue Dumaine.

A sign in the shop's window read "New Orleans' One Stop Shop for All Your Occult Needs!" It was the Quickie Mart of Magick. Once inside, I browsed the shelves with all the enthusiasm of a 12-year-old in Santa's workshop. Pentacles, caldrons, candles, and figurines of every conceivable incarnation of the Goddess were stacked floor to ceiling. It was an impressive display.

But, looking more closely, I realized it was just that—a display. I'd seen it all before, in New York, Toronto, and even Salem: trinkets designed for the mass-marketing of Wiccan spirituality. Even the machine-made Voodoo dolls came equipped with spell packets printed in China.

In lieu of authenticity, I settled for something ornamental: a simple pentacle necklace. I couldn't leave empty handed. And the symbolism of the encircled star could serve as a reminder that, despite the occasional disappointments, Magick *does* exist.

Mark and I strolled west then, toward the heart of the French Quarter. The street performers were out in droves, juggling, dancing, or playing age-old Dixie Land standards on trumpet and flute. We walked along Rue Chartres until we came to Jackson Square and the majestic St. Louis Cathedral. The building's tall spires rose above the surrounding Spanish colonial architecture, above the glowing lamp lights and stretched skyward, pointing toward a darkening backdrop.

The air had become breezy and cool as Mark and I stood together, looking on at the foreboding structure. From where we stood, we could see straight in through the open double doors. Inside, illuminated in warm candlelight, worshippers sat shoulder to shoulder like patrons at a sold-out Broadway show.

"The church is packed every night," I said, pulling my thin jacket around my body.

"How do you know?" Mark asked.

"I read it somewhere. It's because of a spell cast by the Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau."

"She cast a spell on the church?" He ran his open palm over the black,

wiry hairs of his goatee and yawned.

“She wanted to use the garden in back to meditate and to speak with the spirit world. But the priest wouldn’t let her. So she made a deal: If he’d let her use the space, she’d promise to use her powers to pack the church with parishioners every night.”

“Or maybe it’s just a popular tourist attraction.”

“Maybe.” I paused and looked up at the weathered spires. “But there are a lot of well-known churches that aren’t standing-room-only *every* night.”

Mark just rolled his eyes and made a playful smirk.

“Come on,” I said. “I want to take a look inside.” I pulled him along then, by his sleeve, and we meandered through the open doorway. We listened for a moment as the tourist-worshippers chanted the Lord’s Prayer. The smell of incense, the droning voices, and the soft yellow light had me flashing back to the past. I felt drawn in and repulsed at the same time.

“Look,” Mark whispered, pointing to a side room. “They have a gift shop.”

It took me a moment to shake off my post-traumatic Catholic syndrome before I stumbled off with Mark, to the small antechamber. A severe-looking elderly woman glared at us from behind the register as we gawked. Her lips were pursed into a tight frown. I had an odd sensation of being *judged*. And in that moment, I had two very distinct thoughts: One, she couldn’t possibly be so taken aback by two gay men in the heart of New Orleans! And, two, she’s got a lot of nerve judging us considering she’s conducting commerce in a place of worship.

Despite the negative vibes, I found myself drawn to the shelves of statuary and souvenirs. Like *Esoteric Occult Goods*, the space was crammed with spiritual chotchies—gold and silver jewelry emblazoned with Christian symbols, votive candles, and Jesus figurines posed in all manner of perpetual blessing.

And, just like my visit to *Esoterica Occult Goods*, I couldn’t bring myself to leave empty-handed. I told myself that the eight inch plaster Virgin was, to me, just another archetype, the Christian incarnation of the Goddess. Like



Marie Laveau, I could incorporate Mary into my own rituals.

“Are you hungry?” Mark asked as we stepped out into the night air. “I’d like to try this swanky place I read about in one of the hotel brochures.”

A moment later, we were making our way through the crowds to a four-star Cajun restaurant. I don’t remember the name—something French. It was the kind of place we go to when we’re on vacation and have money to blow. I felt out of place. Mark loved it.

“So, are you having a nice time?” He asked, after we’d ordered our dinner.

“I guess.”

“You seem disappointed.” Mark unfolded his napkin, draped it over his lap.

I shrugged. “I guess I was expecting something a little less...*mundane*.”

Mark made a half smile. His thick eyebrows were pinched. “What do you expect from something called the ‘*Haunted History Tour*?’—You didn’t think you were going to see a real ghost, did you?”

“Well...no, I guess not.”

“Look around, Ray. It’s a beautiful night.” Mark glanced left and right as if to guide my attention. “The real magic is *being here*—to be able to enjoy the warm climate when it’s gray and rainy back in Pittsburgh.” He looked down at his plate. “The food is good. The music is great. We’re having a nice time *being together*.” Then he leveled his eyes squarely on me. “You spend so much effort trying to look beyond what’s *here* and *now* that you miss being in the moment.”

“I know.” I bit my lip and managed a weak smile. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, just appreciate the mundane. It’s all we really have.” Mark’s expression seemed almost sad.

“It isn’t like I expected to hook up with a real coven or anything.” I looked down at the table and fumbled with the butter knife, turning it over in my hand. “I guess I wasn’t expecting it to be so touristy.”

“You read too many Ann Rice novels.”



Magick isn't the answer to everything. Just like praying to God for a miracle, it's a rare occasion when the Divine actually intervenes on a grand scale. And the rational part of my brain that governs the every day rituals of life (like getting our 4-year old son off to preschool on time and remembering to put the garbage can out of reach when the dog is home alone) keeps me from buying into the idea that I have any genuine control over the larger universe.



Soon after the trip to New Orleans, Dave confided in me that he'd been diagnosed with a Glioblastoma Multiforme—the most common brain tumor among middle-aged adults. I, of course, went into immediate denial. *If I create my own reality*, I thought, *losing a best friend isn't going to be part of it.*

So, that same night, while Mark was out for the evening, I drew a room-size pentagram and lit five white candles around its border. I called on the Goddess and visualized a life-long friendship with Dave. We would grow old together, sitting on a sun-drenched deck, in our lawn chairs, looking out over a calm blue sky. My beard would be solid white and Dave's long red hair would have turned silver-gray. Both of us would be thin, healthy, and at peace.

After the visualization, I did a tarot card reading—placing each rectangular image on the floor in front of me. I wasn't sure what to think when I got the *Wheel of Fortune* as the “final outcome.” I looked at the face of it, at the circular construct hovering in the heavens, a sphinx at the top and a devil on either side. A trustworthy reference book described its meaning:

*The three personages on the wheel represent on one side, in ascent, all the constructive and beneficial energies that stimulate the growth of the individual. Change is inevitable.*

*This is a beginning. A manifestation. A Destiny in the order of the Kingdom of God.*

Over the next two years, as Dave's health slowly slipped away, I continued to beg, bargain and otherwise threaten "the Powers That Be." But Dave still died—on August 26, 2002. I stayed with him, at his tiny, one-bedroom apartment during the final three days. I felt awkward and intrusive, hanging around, playing with his three cats and helping him to the bathroom. In the last twelve hours, I changed his diapers and gave him morphine.

After his funeral service, I went with his sister and a handful of mutual friends on a clandestine mission to scatter his ashes in the Ohio River, near the fountain at Pittsburgh's Point State Park. Dave had chosen the spot himself. He believed the convergence of rivers—the Monongahela and Allegheny come together to form the Ohio—had once been a place of spiritual power for Native Americans.

We used our bare hands to scoop Dave's gritty remains from a cardboard box and tossed them (him) into the wind, each of us saying our final good-byes. When it was my turn, I couldn't find the words to express my grief. No amount of poetry, prayers or well-written sentiment would ever be enough.



For the next year or so, my interest in any spirituality had followed Dave's ashes to the depths of the Ohio. Without Dave's continued influence and encouragement, the mysterious and sometimes powerful rituals of the Craft now seemed hallow and false.

While I was adrift, in the wake of Dave's death, there were other life-altering events that had me distracted enough to momentarily forget my new-found lack of faith. The most significant by far was the adoption of a son, Benjamin, on September 23, 2002. The moment Ben was placed into our arms, at the crowded Vietnamese orphanage, my life with Mark took a jarring 90 degree turn.

Half a planet away from home (just two days after all the final papers were signed), I found myself standing in the sun-drenched window of a foreign hotel with a helpless infant in my arms. In that moment, I can only remember the tide of mixed emotions washing me further out to sea. My head throbbed with the pressure of it all until I thought I might drown. I looked into Ben's almond eyes and remembered Dave. "I'll always be here for you—"

Mark heard my voice break off. He saw my shoulder's heave and stepped up to the window, coming to stand in front of me. He took Ben out of my arms and gently laid him in the crib. He pulled me to our bed and wrapped his arms around my shoulders as I dissolved into a messy, uncontrollable mass of tears, mucus, and incoherent blubbing. He didn't speak. He didn't tell me everything would be okay. He just held me.

Friends and family were quick to point out the "circle of life" analogy once we'd returned home. And, even though I'd seen *The Wheel of Fortune* card with my own eyes, I dismissed any notion that Dave's death and Ben's birth had anything to do with a natural balance in the order of life. Ben was a new beginning that didn't fill the space Dave left behind.

After we'd settled into a new life of baby formula, diaper bags, and 4 a.m. feedings, I found myself looking back on the spiritual beliefs that had shaped my life. As a parent, I wanted Ben to grow up believing in something larger than the known, physical universe—in the possibility of Magick and the Divine. But, although I still believed in Dave's reality-creating philosophy, it seemed too esoteric, too *outside the mainstream* for a child born into a narrow Judeo-Christian culture. In short, it could only add to the list of things that would potentially make him a target.

As a kind of default, drop-back and punt position, we decided on a Unitarian approach—religion's alternative for wayward liberals who question authority. On a cold, rainy day in October, we took our seat among the parishioners at the First Unitarian Church in Pittsburgh's East End.

We met a few of the other fellow leftists in the weeks that followed—pro-

choice feminists, Pagan environmentalists, and anti-war pacifists. And even though most of the sermons felt more like an ACLU rally than a religious service, we found comfort in being among people whose sense of *inclusion* was at the heart of their spiritual beliefs. So much so that we decided to make our presence known during the traditional sharing of a joy or sorrow—a weekly ritual in which parishioners are invited to stand, come to the front of the church, light a candle, and spill their guts.

It was our sixth or seventh visit when Mark and I moved quietly to the podium, with our new son. I lit a candle as Mark tried to quiet the fussing, five-month-old Ben. The room was utterly still with anticipation. I looked to my new family, holding back a flood of tears. I bent down to the level of the microphone. “Can you tell what our joy is?” I asked. The room broke out in peals of laughter and gentle applause. “This is Ben,” I explained. “He came into our lives just two short months ago.” My heart was swollen and my eyes were blurred with tears. “It’s amazing how...I keep telling myself I couldn’t love him more than I do,” I struggled on, “but...I wake up the next day and it’s like a miracle...It’s funny how there doesn’t seem to be a limit to the amount of love he brings into our lives.”



Four years after Dave’s death and Ben’s arrival, I’m finally beginning to wade back to shore. Although I don’t actively practice Magick, I still wear the pentagram necklace and keep the plaster Virgin on my nightstand. I’m not sure where the current will take me but I know I want to have faith again. There are a number of reasons why: I still want proof that we’re all more than the sum of our parts; I want to believe I’ll see Dave again; And I need to know there’s a better, distant shore waiting at the end of the storm.



I’ve only met a handful of people in my life that seemed to radiate with the

same gentle nature and spiritual energy I had experienced with Dave—and Patricia Carnahan, a retired Episcopalian minister, is one of them.

My own personal connection to her came about after she and her husband, Byron, offered to care for Dave's cats. I needed to find a home for the felines and Mark's mother had suggested their farm just east of Pittsburgh (Patricia and Byron had been close friends to Mark's family).

In an effort to keep in touch, Mark and I had them over for dinner last winter. During the course of the evening, while sitting around a cozy fire, we all got to talking about religion and politics. We agreed the country's recent shift toward fundamentalism was divisive, but, more specifically, Patricia and I fell into sync over the dogmatic letters of Saint Paul. I realized then we both shared a common interest—that we wanted to understand God from an open-minded point of view. We agreed to meet again, just the two of us, to compare notes.

So, on a mild but gloomy February afternoon a few weeks later, Patricia gave me a guided tour of the farm. Wearing a thick, red and gray fleece pullover and muddied boots, she moved along with robust excitement, pointing and smiling like a proud frontierswoman. The terrain, combined with the gray overcast sky, had my mind off and running with images of the northern New England or, better still, the old-world countryside of Dublin. The wide-open grassy meadows and valleys were dotted with withering trees, now barren in the dead of winter. Lines of fencing, strung with wire on dark wooden posts, corralled the sheep now standing along a sharp crest. They stood like bundles of dirty cotton propped up on spindly legs. The animals clumped together as they wandered toward us, huddled behind the largest of them—a male ram with a shaggy fleece and gnarled horns. Patricia recited their names like Mrs. Claus calling to Santa's reindeer. They're farmed for their wool, she told me. None of them were big enough to sell for meat.

When we returned to the house, Nova—Dave's youngest cat—leapt to the windowsill and spied on us as we talked. I was fed ginseng tea and ginger snaps, along with a strong dose of liberal Christianity. Patricia's version of Christ wasn't much like what I remembered from my childhood.

“My Jesus hasn’t failed me,” she explained, “But there are a lot of versions of Jesus running around out there.”

“I don’t think I know your version,” I said, crunching a cookie. “I really believed in Catholicism when I was younger, but, as an adult, the Pope and his various minions made it clear I was unwelcome.”

Patricia frowned. “I’m more frightened by sins of exclusion than of commission.” She refilled my teacup and then added: “Today’s religions are defined more by boundaries than anything else. I don’t think Jesus would have approved.”

“I just don’t see God discriminating between race, gender, or sexual orientation. I think He’d just be above all that.”

“But most people see God in a way that fits with what they know. As a culture, we’ve become fixated on a God that’s patterned after a *human* model.”

“Most people now think of Jesus as a white republican.”

“I’ve always maintained that our view of God needs to evolve just like our view of the universe. Over the centuries, we’ve come to know so much more about human nature, physics, and science in general. During the Middle Ages, the Church was adamant about the earth being the center of the universe...but science and technology revealed a more realistic model. We understand the reality of our world so much better because we’ve allowed for our perception to change and grow.”

“Our view of God needs to evolve like that,” I agreed.

“Yes.” She took up a ginger snap and sat back in her chair. “I think the early Jews had it right when they made it a point not to use God’s name...or to create images of what they thought God might look like. God is too big and too vast to understand so absolutely...or so personally.”

Our conversation went on for the better part of two hours. I had to cut it short, to pick up Ben from his preschool class. Before I left, though, Pat had asked me about my own spirituality. I told her I had once considered myself a devout Roman Catholic, a New Age witch, and then Unitarian. But, more recently, I’d felt detached from all the labels. “I guess I’m still trying to figure

out the larger picture,” I finally said.

Patricia wasn't at all put off by my lack of spiritual continuity. She took it all in and nodded with agreement, then looked at me with her crystal clear eyes: “So maybe you're working toward a more evolved understanding of God.” She smiled. “I think that's all any of us can strive for.”

**Raymond Yeo** resides in Penn Hills, Pennsylvania, with his partner of 18 years and their two children. He is a recent graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, where he studied creative writing and religion. He is the author of “Real Magick,” published in *Best Gay Love Stories 2006* by Alyson Books. “Undercurrent” is a series of excerpts from a much larger work in progress.



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# Ghosts with Flesh

David Finn

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Sifting over  
What we just said,  
Girls from years ago,  
Are haunting conversations  
Girls long since vanished from my heart  
And they are just names connected to fading faces,  
I once kissed  
So long ago  
They dance in memory, they go

And old TV shows from the late 1980's  
That play on re-run  
In the midnight hour  
all thru the Winter  
Somehow mean more to me in memory  
Than all those kisses that once littered me  
In the city where the sun was so cold  
And the star so blue and so many spaceships circled us,  
We were freezing at the headlights, Bob Dylan on the radio,  
We were all so much younger then,  
People are just ghosts with flesh,  
Life changed us all so much

You mean much more  
Than all the numbers from the past that are disconnected  
Like my heart is

If I was 17,  
If I was emo,  
If I combed my dark hair forward,  
If I had a skull tattoo on my ankle,  
If I only listened to cool music,  
Would the whole world love me?  
Would blondes in blue jeans,  
Take me into their beautiful rooms?  
Would white lilies cover all the lakes at night,  
As we walked down amongst the Chinese garden?

I wanted you to stay,  
I wanted you to hold me close,  
I wanted to hold you,  
I wanted to wake up on a lazy Sunday,  
And have every cliché from the lonely hearts club  
Where two strangers finally find each other  
Be mine and yours  
As we drifted thru the beginning,  
That's all I know about what I want,  
That's all I know about what I want

And the sea has no answer,  
Just echoes.  
I can't see the future in the waters anymore.  
The magician may be dead, or lost beneath the grey ocean waves, never to  
return  
Except maybe in dreams.

After a while I turn away,  
The crash of the wild breakers just upsets me,  
Reminds me of the past,  
Reminds me of childhood,  
Listening to John Lennon in my room, all by myself  
The night he would have turned 50  
Wishing he was still walking this world of light and shadow.  
And I could hear the waves crashing back down on the fire-beach  
And I felt entranced by the soft laughter of the beautiful girls  
Whose names I never knew  
As they made out with their beautiful boys  
Whose names I never knew  
Listening to John Lennon in my room, all by myself  
The night he would have turned 50  
When I was 15, I knew he changed the world for us  
And his every song was so close to me, the same song playing in my house  
    now  
And I'm crying for what remains and what must go  
When I was 15, I knew he changed the world for us, I knew  
  
Life changed us all so much  
People are just ghosts with flesh,  
I look in the mirror and I see a ghost with a million reflections,  
I see a ghost looking both past and forward,  
In the mid-90's I looked out the window of a friend's apartment at midnight  
As I watched the cool kids ride by on their skateboards,  
And I felt entranced by all their mystery, as they faded away into the  
    streetlight  
Never to return, leaving me  
Always to wonder where they went  
While I sat in a room with a few stoned friends  
Singing along to the Smashing Pumpkins, wearing our favorite band t-shirts,

Sighing an eternal sigh, screaming along to the chorus  
And it was real, it wasn't fake  
And we were all so shy,  
And we were the kind of friends who hug and kiss and cry  
And tell each other everything  
Down by the Battery at midnight  
We were the kind of friends who pledge allegiance to the crown  
Which rests so uneasy upon the queen  
Lying in her lonely bed  
And pledge allegiance to *Disarm*  
And to *1979*  
We were the kind of friends who forget the holy secret when the sun comes  
up,  
Because sunlight takes away the magic,  
But somewhere deep down inside, I know somebody  
Remembers me...  
Always a kind word to say, always a smile,  
I loved all of you, I went to the ends of the world for you  
People are just ghosts with flesh

Life changed us all so much,  
I see a ghost looking past and forward,  
I see a ghost falling in love with a blonde girl  
Who took me into her beautiful room  
I see a ghost with silver chains around my neck,  
But none around my heart,  
In a dangerous world, I'm open,  
And whatever may happen,  
I feel, for the first time in forever  
I feel, feel something that is not fake  
I feel, I'm open

You saw my heart,  
It's not frozen anymore,  
You saw my heart,  
It's got a place for you to run toward  
You saw my heart,  
No longer cold, no longer hiding  
This is today, 2AM, and I wish  
I could always feel how I feel now, I wish  
I could always feel like I feel now  
So alive for you, not giving up,  
Finally found someone  
Worth trusting, worth something.

I don't want to always be alone,  
I don't want to always be alone

If I was 17,  
If I was emo,  
If I combed my dark hair forward,  
If I had a skull tattoo on my ankle,  
If I only listened to cool music,  
Would the whole world love me?  
Would blondes in blue jeans,  
Take me into their beautiful rooms?  
Would white lilies cover all the lakes at night,  
As we walked down amongst the Chinese garden?

The city is no escape.  
You can only drown in so much neon.  
And so I drown,  
Another restless one,  
Singing softly to songs about love,

So shy inside,  
And sometimes I wonder  
If there really is such a thing as love  
But in my heart I know there's something good  
I know there is a key that will unlock so much  
I know you have to let the feelings in  
I know you have to be brave

On this ocean of afternoons and evenings  
People are just ghosts with flesh  
And endings and beginnings and kids getting slowly older  
On this ocean of whispers and trust,  
People are just ghosts with flesh,  
On this ocean of lovers and those who once loved  
People are just ghosts with flesh.

I want to drift thru the beginning,  
I want you to stay,  
I want you to hold me close,  
I want to hold you,  
I want to drift thru the beginning,  
Drift thru with you.

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# Red Dragon Maze

David Finn

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The only music of mine  
you ever liked  
kinda took me by surprise

I thought you were joking  
I only had it on my IPOD  
Because it reminded me of something  
*Rolling Stone* thought was cool  
When it was cool,

'Cause I read that article back 7 years ago and I never forgot,  
About how shy gothic teenagers held hands in the lost suburbs  
As they got unicorn tattoos and went to the laser show  
Wearing brand new pop culture t-shirts,  
I was so lost in the red dragon maze with bad graphics,  
I didn't have a hand to hold, and I missed the laser show  
But I was a shy gothic teenager from the lost suburbs too  
Wearing brand new pop culture t-shirts  
And I love how songs by bands that no-one else remembers  
Are the songs that trace across your heart, and play across your face  
As you drive alone, as you drive at night, from him to her to him  
And home and back again,

And you always make out like  
The guys never end, and the hurt never ends but the blood will  
And the pleasure is everything,  
It's everything  
Sometimes they give you a movie ticket or buy you something sweet  
It's everything  
And I just wonder how it feels  
To have the whole world want you at 18  
And I just feel so bad for you  
To be so jaded at 18  
But baby, they fucked me at 18, they never stopped fucking me,  
And I always made out like  
The guys never end, and the hurt never ends but the blood will  
And the pleasure is everything  
It's everything  
Sometimes they give you a movie ticket or buy you something sweet  
It's everything

And I know how nobody cares and nobody understands,  
And I know how the stars own you  
They took me a long time ago,  
And I know how you feel about River Phoenix,  
I know all about wandering thru the avenue at 4AM with your IPOD on,  
With the neon on your face as Kanye plays  
And you can feel the way  
Guys just want to fuck and pay,  
And it's so far from the way you just want to be safe  
But I know you're chasing real feelings, I know you're chasing real feelings

And I feel like if you could see in my heart,  
Past the glitter and the mirrorballs  
Past all the diplomatic feedback



You could see the scar inside was almost gone,  
I'm brand new, I haven't been hurt in love this year  
I haven't gone to the seashore in a long time and I have freed her from my  
universe,  
I have freed her from the cage  
I have emptied my soul of everything  
It took such a long time you know,  
Love hurts much more than fucking,  
Love hurts so much more than fucking,  
Love hurts so much more than anything.

But I don't feel any pain anymore, I'm almost today,  
I'm almost there, I'm brand new  
I go to Chinatown by myself as the sun sinks beneath the harbor  
I hear a girl sing a pretty Japanese pop song, and I smile thinking just about  
you,  
I'd like to take you to a club, I'd like to send you pretty flowers, I'd like to kiss  
you softly,  
I know you were a shy gothic teenager, I know you come from a lost suburb  
too,  
I'd like to hold your hand, and help your heart find something real and  
something true

If you could pass beneath my dark sunglasses,  
If you could glide through the Japanese garden,  
If you could see me as I cross the street,  
If I wasn't so invisible,  
If I wasn't just the ghost of a movie star,  
If you could pierce inside my green eyes  
If you could know everything,  
Then you could know everything.  
And *Hey Jude* would say it all again,

And I could die with John Lennon,  
And maybe I would be 14 forever in everyone's mind,  
And maybe I wouldn't be so alone.

**David Finn** is from Sydney, Australia. He is a writer of fiction and poetry. He draws most of his poetry inspiration from song lyrics—his favorite artists include Bob Dylan, John Lennon, George Harrison, Chris Cornell, Johnny Cash. He is currently completing work on a science time-travel fiction novel. He thinks we should follow the dream in our hearts, because they are the most honest thing we have. You can catch him on LiveJournal, <http://redlantern2051.livejournal.com>

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## Lupercalia: Transmutation of the Beast

Self-Portraits by Lupercus, 2008













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# In The Temple of the Allnight Discotheque Playground of Lost Boys

Robert Walker

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I come to this place a Jackmormon nonbeliever  
pagan to a Christian church  
Christian to a Buddhist Temple

Darcel Stevens

recovering Catholic who  
still prays to the Madonna who  
takes communion with a cabana boy in  
men's room stalls and is a  
recovering jock with a  
Navy anchor tattoo and tales of  
gridiron glories whose  
dress sparkles like Koi in a shallow pond  
tries to help me she  
offers vodka drinks saintly substitutes for empathy she  
Leads me through the maze of good things to suck on  
Boypops and Sugardaddys she  
gives up when I  
  
slip offerings into Gstrings and watch the objects of my desire  
(bitchy bottleblondebottom boys)  
Cloister in corners comparing Ambercrombie intentions while  
exchanging blasphemous glances with a longhaired thirtysomething gogoboy



who apes DionysusJesus (goldielocks and the three little bottoms)

I make optical love with an endless array of carnival characters  
paganpriest fatherfigures dancing in the dizzying array of alcoholicfunhouse  
mirrors

I slip out into the flattering night

I watch the lost boys play

Shake rattles poppoppers bop to

The new beat beat eachother off

I learn to play their game

Follow paying men into alleys

In the shadow of a dumpster I find something to believe in  
a crucifix leaking precum

**Robert Walker** was born in Orlando, Florida. He spent his childhood, the oldest kid in a military family, moving to a new city every two or three years. Hereceived a BA in English from Rollins College. While at Rollins he studied with fiction writer and poet Philip F. Deaver and novelist Connie May Fowler. His fiction and poetry has previously appeared in several volumes of Brushings literary journal. Robert is currently a Knobler fellow in the MFA program at Virginia Tech where he is fortunate to study with Erika Meitner, Bob Hicok, Jeff Mann, and Nikki Giovanni among others.

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# The Time I Became Two People

Robert Walker

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Morning after backpocket  
my underwear in

I watch mohawked boys  
on the train ride to Chelsea  
pierced ears  
lips and eyebrows  
nipples pushing against fishnet Tshirts  
fuck Bush buttons and  
Blue hair like sanitized toilet water  
and busted bloody lips likes stains  
first time afternoonafter bedsheets.  
The train bores darknessearth and  
We ride past all the stations  
emergencystopcord. We crush  
earth beneath cold steel.  
mercydarknessmemory  
A child  
paper into two halves  
tears it along

he promised  
to be gentle  
emptied  
the last drops of  
lubricant on  
me  
I screamed fire

lava eruptes in my spine  
I pull every

I fall into

folds bluelined notebook  
licks the fold and  
the spine.

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# Why I'm Kicking Dirt On Your Grave

Robert Walker

---

That night, on the phone, you offered  
I'll love you forevers like the sappy notes teenagers  
slip through the slots on their lockers  
in hallways between classes before mentioning  
affairs with other dicks  
that led to doctors visits  
scary tests lesions on your abdomen  
and thrush on your tongue  
—a thin layer of curdled milk—  
It took ten minutes  
ten failed redials to realize  
I'd made you say  
goodnight when what you'd called to say  
was \_\_\_\_\_.

And when my shoes get too dirty  
or my legs get too tired vodka  
is a good slow burning memory  
that curls in my stomach cradles  
the middle of me helps me forget the way  
you pooled out like a halo—angelizing yourself—  
soaking into the carpet.

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# GONE!

## a Ragga Vibration

Sud Ram

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### ONE

—Ragga, wake up, you have to go.

—Hrmmm...

—It's already late, you've had plenty of sleep and I have to leave.

—Hrmmmm

Venus' mother was a shaman in the Amazon and her father was an explorer who apparently never told anyone where he was from. He spoke French, English and Spanish and taught these languages to his daughter even though it didn't really matter in the context they lived in. Venus learned Ayahuasca plant medicine from her mother and was sent out of the forest when she was sixteen to share her knowledge with the future survivors of The Sneeze because it had been predicted that she would be one of them. This was the highest possible honour one could receive from the tribe and still today she carries out her assignment with all her heart.

The bathroom I enter is more Zen than a temple, except for the presence of a living goddess...

—Yes? What is that deliciously disturbing look?" She says with a beaming smile.

—I just couldn't bring myself to remember that I wanted to brush my teeth." I smile back teasingly.

—Use my toothbrush, and tell me what you think of this new toothpaste I got. Some friends of mine who live in the forest of Neppertal make it. They

only use produce from their land for it, not that it really matters but I like the taste of it.

—What doesn't really matter? The taste or that they only use produce from their land?

—Neither really, toothpaste is overrated, what's important is to brush thoroughly.

—I see...

The imperial size wooden Jacuzzi tub is full of foam, breasts and legs, a definite invitation to slip inside.



The intimate encounter with Venus had gone deeper into me than I could have ever imagined. We met five moons ago thanks to Angela who brought her to my last workshop and our connection just sparked from the moment our eyes decided to look into each other. Venus came to the event with her partner at that time, Dargan.

My ashram life as a monk had finished and it was a time where I was coming back to the world to work in and with it. Angela was of course the angel that guided me back into this dimension. It was her second time at a workshop of mine and she knew that she would be part of a renewal in my life even before I understood the implications of my decision.

Seven moons before leaving the ashram, I had a vision, or astral meeting with Angela. I recognized her from a previous apparition in a dream, many years ago in the first years of The Sneeze, when marijuana was part of every moment of my life. She appeared to me in an ancient Egyptian temple and required me to stop smoking if I ever wanted to become a magician. This time, more than 10 years later, her form was different, she looked much younger, but the energy and voice were the same. She told me we were soon going to meet in the physical realm and that we would work together.



Encantada is a small town that was created in 2006 as a spiritual and artistic project by and for alternative people who wanted to live a life that allowed them to express their talents and create a space where anyone with a similar intention could help and join. Their vision was inspired by Auroville, Findhorn and Damanhur whose functional models for big scale eco-communities were examples of success to all.

My home, workplace and sanctuary are located in a small cottage just outside of town bordering the nature reserve of Theta.

—Hi Sally, how are you?

—Fine thanks. Melissa Salomon is here to see you, she's waiting in your office. She says she spoke to you on the pod yesterday and you told her to come early. How was your date with Venus?

—Incredible..." I wonder back to last night's events with a blissful smile.

—I see." She giggles.

—Well it's time for a bit of focus now isn't it? Did Melissa mention anything I should know?

—Nope, she was very silent and looks a bit uneasy, as most of your visitors do the first time they meet you...

—Ok, I imagine you gave her some tea already.

—Of course.

—Right then, speak to you later.

—Ciao!

All my clients come to me through referrals. This allows for all the discretion I need in my work and because of the level of intimacy I reach with my clients, this is of absolute importance. I help people face their darkest sides, their deepest fears and their wildest fantasies in order to be free and accomplish their dreams and live the beauty of life.

Even today, my methods are somewhat controversial but many times it is necessary to use an approach similar to what the ancient sages call the Left Hand Path of Kaula Tantra. This line of practice often requires the physical materialisation of occult desires and fantasies. In this sense, a lot of my work is

on the brink of madness, guiding people to a place where they eventually are forced to make the most conscious choice possible and transform their pain into freedom. Experience is at the core of all my practice because it is possible to transcend when one has actually fulfilled and felt the whole intensity of a given situation or pattern.

“Good afternoon Melissa”. She stands up from the chair and shows herself to be a beautiful black woman in her early 30’s with straight long hair, comfortable bright colored clothes and emerald cat eyes. She seems more at ease than Sally had described and there is undoubtedly a sense of familiarity between us.

—Hello Ragga, I’m glad to finally meet you. Maria has said so many incredible things about you that I had to see for myself.

—I’m happy to hear that Maria is doing well.

—Yes, I’ve never seen her so loose and happy. She seems to be having the time of her life.

—We keep in touch and last time we spoke she sounded very happy indeed.

—Now I can tell her we’ve met. She’ll be thrilled to know.

—OK Melissa, before we start, I’d like to ask you that anything that is said in this room stay within it and anything that happens is something that we keep between us. This is very important in the work I do, each person has their own individual experience and telling others what goes on will generally create obstacles for both of us. I will never tell anyone anything and to start working with you, I have to ask the same commitment from you even if at any time you decide not to work with me anymore.

—That’s fine with me.

—Very well then, let’s begin.

## Two

The drumbeat is loud and pulsating in the forest of Neppertal tonight. Venus and I have been invited by her toothpaste friends to join them for the weekend and I was happy to accept. I'd heard so much about the newly created community of Neppertal but never had the opportunity to meet its inhabitants so I was quite excited.

The small village is a beautifully crafted set of a dozen tree houses, blending totally with the surrounding Nature, built only with material found in the forest. The structures that are built on the ground are their temple, their workshop, the kitchen and the dining room.

—Hey guys, welcome! It's always a pleasure to be in your presence dear Venus and it's an honour to have you as our guest tonight Ragga.

—It's been a while since I have been here", says Venus

—Thank you for inviting me as well Dargan, I've heard so much about the commune I couldn't hold my joy when Venus told me that there was a ceremony tonight and that we were invited.

—Ragga my man, not only are you invited but you are our guest of honour and I've been sent by the community to ask you to be our guide for the ceremony.

My face must have made an impression because both of them started to laugh uncontrollably.

—I'm not sure Dargan, I have never worked with any of you before.

—You'll manage", says a very familiar voice coming from behind me.

—Angela?!

—Don't look so surprised darling, I wouldn't believe it if you told me you didn't sense I would be here tonight.

—Well I had a hunch but..." she stopped my words with a sweet kiss on my lips.

—Nice to see you too", she smiles, "and you my beloved Venus".

They hug like they haven't seen each other in years. The bond between these two women is so strong that I cannot imagine anything coming between



them.

Dargan says to me quietly “come with me, you should meet the rest of the people. The girls will join us later.” We slowly walk along a narrow forest trail into a light created by the flames of a fire the size of red. Children, adults and elders are all in a circle, some are drumming, some are chanting, some are playing instruments and others are just sitting with their eyes closed. I feel welcomed without words, a telepathic acknowledgment that I belong in this circle tonight.

The music flows like a waterfall of pure fresh water and transports me to a lake of dissolution. I can feel Venus and Angela slowly entering the trail at the entrance and approaching the circle in silence. As they are about to sit next to me, Angela touches me gently to get my attention and she presents me with my hand drum.

“Sally brought it for you” and she points to the other side of the circle where Sally is smiling to me as she sits down. I smile back and whisper “thank you”. At this point it becomes clear to me that I am being asked to inaugurate the spiritual work of the community. All the people I’ve connected with in the past few months in Encantada are here.

My emotions are so strong that I burst out laughing and crying at the same time. I hadn’t felt so welcome in a very long time, it was like finding a new family and I was ecstatic. The ripples of energy started forming a pattern and a beat began to flow from my arms into the drum and my emotions channelled to the percussion. I was drumming again.

I hadn’t entered the dimension of rhythm since I met Venus at the workshop, not that the relation is necessarily one of direct cause and effect but the timing is synchronistic. A number of events changed my perspective since then. The workshop itself was so intense and full of celebration that I felt it wouldn’t be a good idea to repeat any more, expectations would become too high. In this line of thought, I decided to focus my work on individual consultations in my office and sometimes a house call for more specific purposes and energy clearing. It was like the drum needed a time to rest and be left quietly on the altar in the cottage.

As the beat gains in depth and echo, it starts to entrance all of us and the momentum of the group begins to form fractal dynamics of prana. The drums of the circle are perfectly synched and the flutes are singing like the birds of the forest, inviting us for a ride into the skies. Venus' voice enters this magical space and oozes a chant calling the heart of the planet, lava in the form of sound, burning, destroying and yet gentle, slow, embracing and preparing a space of fertility. Mother Kali is incarnated tonight and is the divine aspect for tonight's inspiration.

The power grew to be overwhelming and the children naturally left the circle in silence. I sensed a tampering with the creation of the group energy, like a force directing the momentum to a level beyond the understanding of anyone in the circle.

Tony.

Suddenly I open my eyes and he was there, in the flames, smiling at me. "This is a nice place Ragga, why didn't you invite me?" he jokes. No one else can hear or see him and our conversation takes place telepathically, in a private channel of the noosphere, while my body is still drumming.

—You'd have to tell people you could be invited first.

—Hehe, that would take the fun out of my life.

—So will you be with us tonight?

—No I just came to see if you were all right. Guiding your first ceremony in a long time is important, how do you feel about it?

—I'm not sure.

—I think you'll be fine, Angela and Venus are there to help you. There is something I need to tell you though.

—Yes?

—I think it is better to let Melissa Salomon find her path alone.

—I don't see the connection or the reason.

—I know, that's why I needed to tell you. Enjoy the night Ragga, you have a lot of work to do here.

—Thank you Tony..." he had already moved out of my perception.

I felt much more at ease after having received the blessings of my master

for the ceremony, this kind of work involves dimensions that are hardly close to the awareness of most people and there are always very dark and difficult aspects to deal with. At times when the energy shifts into an imbalanced space of fear, it feels a bit like a battlefield of the old ages, with bows arrows and swords with the most unusual edge that the troops every now and then turn against their guide...

Entheogenic work is very unpredictable, unless you are totally free of your ego, you never know how it will turn out but I'm quite sure that with the help of Venus and Angela everything will run smoothly.

The drumming slowly starts to calm down and silence gently imposes its presence. Dargan leaves the circle and comes back with a box replete of mushrooms. He puts it down in front of me and murmurs an incantation to the fungi before going back to his place in the circle.

After the call for Kali and the appearance of Tony, I am able to see the energy of the material plane, of people, plants and objects. The mushrooms emanate an enormous amount of power and I automatically deduce that they were picked in the forest today. Or rather, the mushrooms themselves tell me their story.

Through them I learn how to connect to the people in the circle and what to work with. They tell me how much of themselves has to be given to each person and when. They are friends from the planes of the divine who live to guide us to their knowledge and freedom.

The night is warm and clear, the stars are in the mood for showing off their brilliance and the nocturnal animals of the forest have started their late concert. Dargan picks up his didgeridoo to play its deep sounds that call for the beginning of the ceremony. I get up and distribute the mushrooms to each person following the guidance given by them and establish eye contact – soul contact, with everyone.

After returning to my place, I ask Dargan to create enough sound space for me and gently enter his sound wave, letting out an Icaro chant:

*Abre-te corazón*

*Abre-te sentimiento*

*Abre-te entendimiento*

*Deja ao lado la razón*

*E deja brillar al sol*

*Escondido en tu interior*

*Aa aa aaa*

*Abre-te memoria antigua*

*Escondida en la Tierra en las plantas, bajo el agua, bajo el fuego.*

*Abre-te corazón*

*Abre-te sentimiento*

*Abre-te entendimiento*

*Deja ao lado la razón*

*E deja brillar al sol*

*Escondido en tu interior*

*Aa aa aaa*

*Es tiempo ya, ya es ahora, abre-te corazón e recuerda como el espíritu cura*

*Como el amor sana*

*Como el árbole floresce e la vida perdura*

*Abre-te corazón*

*Abre-te sentimiento*

*Abre-te entendimiento*

*Deja ao lado la razón*

*E deja brillar al sol*

*Escondido en tu interior*

*Aa aa aaa*



After a few rounds during the night of distributing more mushrooms and helping people go beyond the cries, laughs and other manifestations of release, it was my turn to be taken away by the power of the mushrooms.

I stayed connected to the circle but had to leave into the forest for some time alone. I was transported into a past life experience of power domination, where I abused of a woman, my personal whore. I situated the space-time continuum around the beginning of the twentieth century in the south of what used to be the United States of America and my wife in this vision knew of what was going on but it isn't clear what her opinion on this was or what part she took in these dynamics. This sequence was of tremendous intensity. I hadn't felt this kind of power from inside for a long time, since the first time I guided a ceremony in 2012, three orbits ago.

The pattern had been acknowledged but I sensed some related situation would surface in the near future to seal the healing and that now was not the time to continue. The vision had presented itself and I had to return to the circle to work with the group.



The first lights of the day fused with the dark night and one by one, the stars melted into the clear blue of the day. As the first rays of the sun beamed upon the fire, I held my drum and played to announce the end of the circle and the beginning of the application of the teachings of the ceremony into the daily process of existence as we return to the waking life.

Many celebrated and joy could be heard as people danced to greet the new day. This ceremony had been amazing, the group dynamics had been far deeper than most previous experiences and the personal aspects had been very open from every participant. It hardly could have gone better even though I had to delve into some delicate energetic surgery with a participant.

Venus is dancing, her long and tall shape floating in the light of the sun. Her black hair whirl around and hover over the curves of her shoulders drawn by the hand of Perfection, like the rest of her body. She turns around to look at me and her face appears to me like a vision of the ultimate personification of the Woman.

In this orgasmic realization of our eternal bond, I fall on my back and

surrender to everything, again. I hear her approaching and she crouches down by my side, staring into me with her almond shaped golden eyes. “I can hear you”, she whispers, “and I’m happy to know that you’ve recognized me.” In a flash, she is gone, dancing again wildly, singing and laughing with everyone.

“I could use a glass of Kefir,” I say out loud to myself as I get up. I feel exhausted, this was even more work than Tony had made me understand it would be. Seeing a shade under an old tree, I decide to lie down and rest there for a while. I would wait for everyone to have their breakfast and relax before interacting with humans again.

—Ragga?

—Yes?

—Would you like a glass of Kefir?

I open my eyes to see Sally with a big glass full of the delicious looking beverage.

—Venus asked me to bring it to you.

—Thank you so much Sally. It’s just what I needed.

—No it’s me who thanks you. I had never experienced your work in such a way and, well, I am extremely grateful for it.” She holds my hand and kisses my cheek lightly with a shy smile. “I never thought I could feel intimate with myself again”.

I smile and drink the Kefir. “I’m just going to rest here for a bit”, I say falling back into my foetal position, fulfilled and satisfied by my drink. I drift off into the Dreamtime.



Melissa Salomon was born on the island of Haiti in a family with an ancient tradition of Voodoo and magic. Even though her parents were not directly involved in these kinds of activities, her grandmother made a point in educating the young Melissa into the arts of trance, possession, spiritism and of course into the extremely complex realm of demons, manipulation and revenge. She excelled at all of them and pushed the limits of these arts by

using her phenomenal beauty and sexual energy, experimenting with incest, orgies and all kinds of chaotic taboo breaking activities.

She came to me because of recent events in her life, she told me that her practices are backfiring and she asked me for help in releasing herself from the anger she has learned to use. The time has come for her to break the limits of what some call the “dark” side of magic and to seek guidance to find her way towards freedom.

I am of course honoured that such a task would be offered to me but it seems that Tony has another vision for this situation. It’s been a week since our consultation and I will have to call off our process in my appointment with her after lunch.

This morning however, I am in Venus’ colorful bedroom, lying in bed and feeling the rays of the sun on my face shining through the window, warming my skin.

—Ragga, what are you thinking of?

—I thought you could hear me”, I answer teasingly.

I’ve learned to position my brainwaves’ thought patterns on a frequency that can only be accessed by humans that have reached a stage of Samadhi. When I am surprised or when I come to a realization, this frequency changes and momentarily becomes open to be read by anyone with telepathic abilities. I can also choose to open my channel to anyone I wish to share my thoughts with.

—Bah. Come on, tell me, where were you just now?

—I was at work. Something new I have to deal with.

—Well I’m here right now next to you and I ask for your full and complete attention.

—Yes? Why is that?

—I want to acknowledge you as my chosen partner in this plane, in this life.” She opens the drawer of her night table and pulls out a collar made of hemp thread interwoven into a mandala around a beautiful emerald. “My gift to you, a small token of the expression of my love for you.

—This is amazing! Thank you!

—Don't say anything, just hold me.

Bliss is the only word than can remotely convey what it feels like for me to be in the presence of Venus. Any physical contact with her exponentially increases this experience and I cannot even put into any conceptual idea of what making love to her means.

Although she has had romantic relationships, Venus has only had sexual relationships with her husband, Aktuh, who still lives in the jungle and with whom she still corresponds but no longer regards as her spouse. She never needed physical sexuality to express herself, which is not surprising at all considering that her education was done in a peaceful environment, in complete harmony with Nature.

Our relationship has brought a new range of tantric experiences since we both had been celibate for a long period of time and had learned to work with Kundalini energy in extremely powerful ways. Together we are discovering the deepest sexual forms of the Yin and Yang.

—You know, the night before I met you, I saw you in a dream. You were an eagle flying to me and when you came closer, I saw your face and your body became human. When you touched me we were making love and I had the strongest orgasm I had ever had until I made love to you in this plane on our first date. Because of this dream I knew you were the one I had been waiting for and I wanted to feel you inside me. But I had to be patient and wait because you took five months to invite me!!

—What could I do?" I ask out laughing. "It was a strange time for me, so many things changed because of Tony's death that I had to deal with a whole new way of organizing my life.

—You really love that man don't you?

—Infinitely.

She smiles at me and puts her hand under my shirt onto my chest "I'm glad that the Universe has brought our hearts to beat together".



## THREE

My office is a big open spaced room with almost no decorations. I am quite a minimalist when it comes to additions, I feel they distract energy most of the time. The disposition is of course very informal and consultations are usually held amongst pillows on the floor over the large oriental carpet. I've recently added a chair, a sofa and a table for testing a different feel to the room but I think they don't fit in so well so maybe I'll ask Venus to come and have a look and help me find a balanced setting.

I decided to come a bit earlier this afternoon, it seemed wise to take some time to make sure the room was energetically safe and clear. I also took the opportunity to meditate and dance by myself, which I hadn't done in over a week since I've been with Venus. I was finding a space again that I forgot I needed and it felt very good. Also the idea of having to cancel the process with Melissa was moving like tides in my mind because I was very much looking forward to this challenge.

I have learned many times that even though Tony's words hardly ever make sense, they are precious and reveal their wisdom when one stops the effort of understanding.

I was now almost asleep naked on the floor, lying down on my back with my eyes closed and feeling the air moving in the room. It is a very hot day and the open windows are my only source of fresh air. I love the simple life and every time I can, I let my clothes go and feel my skin all over my body. Even as a child, my mother would dress me and as soon as she turned her back I would be naked again with my clothes thrown around the room.

I wake up feeling a hand gently caressing my stomach accompanied with a sweet purring voice, "Hello Ragga, I hope you don't mind but I've made myself comfortable as well". It was Melissa, she was lying down naked next to me.

—Oh I'm sorry I didn't hear you knock

—That's because I didn't", she giggles, "Sally told me to come in so just

opened the door and found you asleep.

—I apologize, I must have dozed off.

—Don't worry, I actually liked to be welcomed this way!

I slowly sit up and take some time to look at her. I didn't imagine her body to be so perfect, sharp, toned and muscled in such a harmonious way. Her breasts showed no sign of ageing even though she has a daughter that she breastfed for two and a half years. As she gets up and walks to the pillows and carpet, I can admire the back of her undulating curves and hips that shape two globes that would be inspiration for all the sculptors of the world.

I didn't call off our meeting on the pod because I wanted to speak to her in person about my decision to respect Tony's advice but something in me was starting to tell me that I should have done so.

I walk up to her and before I start speaking she says "You don't need to tell me, Tony asked you to not work with me anymore. Am I right?"

I sit down, amazed. How could she possibly know about Tony and even more that he spoke to me about her?

—Well yes. I wanted to tell you in person that I appreciate you choosing me to help you but that I feel the need to follow the request of my teacher. But, how can you know about this?

She looks out the window for a moment and then turns back at me, fixing her hypnotic green eyes into mine, "Tony has asked me to leave you alone as well. He actually asked me not to call you even before we spoke the first time but I could not resist. I need help you see, and no one but you was willing to work with me, people are afraid of my past and of my powers. Now you seem to be doing the same, not that I blame you but I had hopes that you would be different.

—It's not that I'm afraid, I was actually looking forward to this challenge.

—Then why do you refuse to continue?

—I cannot pinpoint any logical reason Melissa. Believe me, I understand your need for help and I know that we could grow together with this but I also know that Tony's requests are never without deep wisdom.

—Has he never been wrong?

I turn my eyes away from hers and think for a bit before I answer.

—Only once, and I'm still not sure if he was really wrong or if I haven't understood what it was all about yet.

—So you're not sure of his infallibility

—How can I be sure of anything?

—That's precisely my point. Listen Ragga, I want your help. Understand that I've looked in many places around the world, for a very long time. There is no other human being out there with the necessary knowledge and power to give me a hand, I'm desperate.

—But why such a fixation with me?

—Because you have the power I need. You teach me what you know and I will show you things you have never learnt before with Tony. I know you always wanted to play around with shadows, and I can introduce you to that world.

—Oh come on, that's not something I want to do anymore!

—Really? There is so much more I could show you Ragga, a whole range of power you have never tasted and that is waiting for you. With your heart and clarity you could work with all this without falling into the traps and learn so much more about the hidden dynamics of the Universe. Think about it.”

For a long time I thought I was beyond these ideas, but her tone of voice was so sharp, she was entering into my desires. She had a point, we could help each other mutually. The truth is, the darker side of power always fascinated me and even though Tony always managed to show me it was a waste of time, my curiosity was never satisfied. What could be the danger? If anything went wrong I could stop working with her.

—I don't know Melissa, what if we lose it?

—What is there to lose? Haven't you crossed the abyss of death already?

—Well yes, but this is different.

—Indeed it is. Let me give you a taste for you to make up your mind.

Just close your eyes.

I closed my eyes and I could see Melissa just like if they were open, but now her power shined inside me and her beauty became overwhelming. I could sense and see a vibrant red color pulsating from her first chakra floating over me and wrapping my whole body, awakening my animal energy and tickling my anger. I felt more and more sexually aroused but in a way that I hadn't felt in a long time, or maybe not, a power like... The vision in the ceremony! Melissa is the woman! I open my eyes suddenly.

—Do you remember now?" She asks in an imposing tone, "You were not very kind to me in those days. I was your faithful maid, your whore, your slave and you used me like a pet.

—So it's you.

—Yes, it's me. You see why we have to work together? You owe me.

—Maybe... But if Tony said it wasn't right then I cannot.

—Don't be a little boy Ragga, make your own decisions for once, isn't it obvious? Look at you and look at me. Let me show you a bit more, close your eyes again.

I obeyed blindly but I could still see her and the growing energy. I was becoming increasingly aroused, my penis was completely erect and I could feel a fire burning inside me that made me want to pass all my flames onto her. My mouth was salivating like I was a hungry beast wanting to devour the meal of my life.

She came closer to me and caressed my penis gently with her hand "It's time to change the game Ragga, this has to be mine now", she lowered her head and loosened her tongue on the tip of my erection. It was like a lightning bolt passing through my body, but now my eyes were locked, there was no way I could open them. Her aroma penetrated my senses totally, she emanated the bitter softness of smooth dark cocoa chocolate and the subtle sweet fragrance of almond flowers. It wasn't a perfume, only her delicate pearls microscopically bubbling through her pores.

—Now don't tell me you want me to stop. Or do you?

I was paralysed in ecstasy, no answer could be even thought of. Her voice

echoed in my head so deeply that it rang into infinity, every word sounded like the purr of a cat in heat. She gently grabbed my shaft and with a finger on my tip, circulated until the first drop of salty semen surfaced. She closed her wet lips around the tip, lapped it with her tongue and emitted a moan of profound delight.

—You taste better than in my dreams. I want to suck you and drink all your cum, may I?

Her question was dipped in soft caramel. I fell on my back, surrendering like a subjugated animal. No words were able to exist. I shivered without control, possessed by electricity. Her mouth felt like the warmest, sweetest honey and her hands moved like water and lava joining together. She continued only to slow down as she felt my ejaculation about to spurt.

—And now Ragga? What should I do? Will you work with me? Or should I leave the room? If I swallow your cum, you become my toy until I release you. If I leave, my energy will stay contained in this frustrating emotion. Either way, you're under my spell, choose which one you want to live with. Split second choice my dear.”

Surprisingly, she underestimated me. I am more than well trained in sex magic and I could free myself from either spell but I was curious and admittedly, she knew what she was doing. My choice at this point was between playing her game or ending it right here, right now.

I opened my eyes and looked at her.

—Keep going.” Her faced beamed with delight.

—With pleasure my darling.

She worked her hands on my penis again, licking only the outer glands of the tip and closing her lips tight around the head, sucking like the vacuum of an octopus' tentacles. It was only a matter of seconds before I flooded her mouth with my semen with a cry coming from the caves of my guts, so loud and deep that it must have been heard all the way into the reserve of Theta. The orgasm was as intense as the Big Bang, I felt like a whole Universe had been exploded inside me and it continued to expand, nothing could stop it. The energy was sparkling randomly, a chain reaction of lost cells moving all

ways. My body was in spasms for minutes without end, time had vanished and I was a living thermonuclear explosion.

She didn't remove my penis from her mouth or stop sucking until it became soft again. Each slow movement of her tongue and mouth kept the orgasm's intensity.

—You see this is just the beginning. From now on, you will do what I tell you to do and don't even think of trying to betray me. I have swallowed you now, and your power is my toy, I can make you feel anything I want you to feel. I pledge to keep you happy if you keep me happy. I'm going to enjoy this ride, and so are you my darling, so are you. To begin, you will call off all your consultations for the next month. I am your only "client" now.

I felt totally hypnotized, in trance, like a puppet. It didn't matter, she was beautiful, powerful and she would finally satisfy my curiosity.

—That's easy. Sally will take care of that in five minutes.

—Ah yes, the shy Sally, blonde, cute and deeply perverted behind her mask of ingenuity. Totally devoted to you isn't she? You helped her overcome her father's rape and now you are her hero. But you are going to fuck her brains out after I leave and make her feel like shit again.

—What?

—You'll see, she'll love it. She will ask for more the minute you stop.

—Are you serious?

—Do I look like I'm joking?

—But where does this stop? I mean, Venus and I...

—Of course, sweet Venus," she says with a malefic grin, "when you go to her house tonight, don't be surprised if you get a bit rough... You might be surprised at how violent you can get.

—What is that supposed to mean?!

—Just shut up and listen to me. You need to give in to your anger and act upon it, there is no choice. Sweet little Venus will have a hard time grasping the whole picture of what's going on, no matter how open your relationship is. But trust me, she will enjoy tonight's experience. I promised I would keep you happy and I keep my promises.

I couldn't believe my ears, this was all too crazy and yet she had uncovered the simplest and obvious truths of my dominating power ordering me to play them out. I felt like a child who was about to play practical jokes on his friends.

—Now close your eyes again, I will work on you. Just stay relaxed on your back and don't move.

Melissa's kiss was another spell, opening a door with an amount of sensuality that only a master could tune into. She lied down on top of me, her soft and shiny dark skin sticking to mine, warming up to one another and blending our sweat as she gently rubbed her body. She whispered an unknown chant in my left ear and sensually licked it. I was transported into the jungle where she was now a black panther and her emerald eyes pierced through my spirit. Purring on her prey, teasing, licking and biting, playing with its fear. Her aroma was now the only thing I could smell, she was all my breath.

Melissa delicately moved her body to position her vagina on my stomach with her forelegs on the ground and her thighs holding my chest, facing me. She started to rotate her hips and to rub her vulva on my navel, letting out gentle sounds due to the growing moisture of her organ. I could feel her fluid dripping on my body and in a matter of seconds, my penis was in erection again.

“Good” she says, “you have a strong one”. She turned around and put her vulva to my mouth whilst facing my penis again. “Eat me and drink all you can, I'm going to get you fired up again” she said as she gobbled my shaft.

She tasted like sugar water, it was addictive, I couldn't stop licking her and sucking every drop I could. I was having the most exquisite dessert and she just gently kept my erection strong enough for her to play around. After my tongue had released its power on her clitoris for some time and my fingers played like a piano inside her like a Mozart sonata, she released her orgasm. She yelled and roared like a wild cat, with more of her precious sweet drink flowing into my throat. I could feel her energy transferring into all my cells, stronger than any audible sound vibration could make atoms move. She was invading me with her soul.

—That was delicious my darling” she purrs, “And because our souls are now inseparably joined, I will call you David Solomon”.

David? How did she know that name?

“I can hear you”, she whispers, “and I’m happy to know that you’ve recognized me.” She lets out a manic laughter and rolls on the floor uncontrollably before calming down and smiling at me. “This is going to be a lot of fun David darling. Now it’s time for me to go, I will see you tomorrow whenever you arrive here. I’ll be waiting for you”.

She quickly got up and gathered her clothes but walked out the door without getting dressed and left it open. I was still very much aroused when Sally kindly peeked through the door and asked if everything was ok. My answer came out without thinking.

—I could use some help actually. Why don’t you get undressed and come here?

Melissa was more than right, Sally ended up demanding to be treated like a slut and we had sex three times in a row. Of course she first acted naïve and asked about my relationship with Venus and about our professional relationship but after I pulled her hair and got her to the floor, she quietly opened her legs.

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When I arrived at Venus’ house I was exhausted. I had been questioning the whole game on the way and I couldn’t even imagine obeying Melissa’s order. I had to be very delicate in my words because I could not break the vow of secrecy that was established with Melissa but I had to show all the cards to Venus.

—You look like you’ve been drained by a thousand vampires today” she laughs.

—That’s more or less what happened.” I reply in a dry tone.

She fell silent, walking me up to her living room.

—Lie down here and I’ll bring you some juice”, she said pointing to the sofa.

—Wait. I have to tell you something.



—What is it?

I was trying to brew the most diplomatic answer but I couldn't so I just blurted "I had sex with two different women this afternoon". She just laughed at me and said, "Well why the long face then? Shouldn't you be happy about it?"

—It's a complicated situation Venus, strange powers are at play with one of them.

She went to get me the juice and came back with a full glass, some corn nachos and a homemade guacamole. My favorite.

—Here you go tiger, you need to get your strength back because if you think you can go fooling around with other women and leave me as a side dish, you're wrong. So who are they?

—I can't tell you.

—What!? Why not?

—It's related to work. Look, I have trouble feeling comfortable trying to explain, but I understand if you want to know, the least I could do is tell you who they are, but I can't. It would get me into more trouble than either of us could ever imagine." After a moment of silence, I break into tears, overcome by an uncontrolled release of sadness without any apparent reason.

—Hey, hey, Ragga. I understand if you don't want to tell me, it's ok. You are free golden eagle, do what you need to do."

She lies down next to me and holds me tight in her arms where I let go completely and sob endlessly. Her kisses are soothing and yet, anger grows in me at each little touch or movement she does, as if she were teasing me. I stop crying and in my emotions, I hate her. A voice inside is telling me that she is making a ridicule of me, that she is weak and will not face my actions or me. This bolt of hatred overcomes and arouses me.

I break free of her arms violently and look at her in the eyes, where gold flows into infinity. She seems to sense my thoughts and smirks at me, as if she were challenging me. Losing all control of myself, I rip her dress off, lower my shorts, lift us both up and turn her against the wall when I suddenly realized I was playing Melissa's spell out. I stopped short and let go of Venus who was

in turn quite aroused and intrigued by all this energy.

—“What’s all this about?” she asks as I sit down on the sofa again.

—I’m sorry, I was going to involve you in a silly game.

—“Is there anything that says I can’t play?” she asks in a curious and defiant voice.

—It’s not that Venus, it’s all just so strange and I’m confused.

—Well let me clarify things a little for you then. This vision you had in the ceremony and the woman that turned you into a lollipop today are the same. She was your whore a century ago and I’m your wife in that vision. Tony came to me and explained the whole thing. I know who she is Ragga, her name is Melissa Salomon. He also told me things would become a little strange for some time between us and that I shouldn’t worry and concentrate on helping you keep track of your work.

—Wow, well it seems that I don’t have to break my secrecy vow after all. I’m relieved that you know about everything Venus but you could have told me earlier no?

—“I’m allowed to play games too sometimes” she retorts with a malefic grin. “I wanted to see how far you’d go into her web and I was willing to play her game with you to help you out.

## FOUR

The day had started with clouds and very cold air outside but as we sat in the dining room to eat breakfast, Venus pointed towards the window.

—Look Ragga, it’s snowing!

—Yesterday the blazing sun, today the snow. It’s amazing how animals cope with these weather fluctuations.

—Like us, they adapted.

—I know but still, it’s amazing...

On September 11, 2001, the planet entered a cycle of destructive regeneration that was completed on January 31, 2012. Since then the whole

planet, humanity, animals, plants and minerals have entered a new era, one that was called The Age of Aquarius by the hippies of the 1960's. Ironically, most of them never got to see this age because to this day, the human population of the planet amounts to an optimistic total of seven hundred thousand people. During the eleven-year period of destruction that we call today "The Sneeze", the world as we knew it disappeared.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the whole war on terrorism that followed proved to be the biggest and cleverest mass manipulation and propaganda campaign ever created. Much like Hitler accused the communists of burning the Reichstag in the 1930's, the U.S government orchestrated attacks and wars accusing an organization that had secretly been created by the C.I.A under the name of Al-Qaeda, in order to gain control over all the world's oil reserves. These terrorists never really existed, they were created to feed the media and to induce the masses into paranoia, thus justifying the United States' actions. The first part of the plan proved efficient in it's own twisted way.

Afghanistan was invaded under the pretext of hunting down the supposed leader of Al-Qaeda who later became "not much of a concern" and Iraq was invaded because of "irrefutable proof" that they withheld Weapons of Mass Destruction that were never found. Iran became the next target due to a supposed nuclear weapon threat but since people were no longer happy with war, George W. Bush abolished U.S. democracy thanks to the previously voted Patriot Act and became a dictator, giving him liberty for his and his friends' greed. Thus followed the invasion of all the countries in the Gulf with the help of forced military drafts. However, Saudi Arabia proved to be more challenging than Bush had thought. The rest of the world was obviously not happy with this "invasion spree" so Europe, Russia and China created an alliance against the Americans to stop this madness and came to Saudi's help. People didn't even bother to call it World War III, there was more to deal with.

In 2010, world pressure was so strong against China to free Tibet that the Chinese government decided to end the matter by launching five nuclear

bombs onto the occupied territory plus an extra “lost” one into Dharamsala in India, where the Dalai Lama lived in exile so that the Buddhist issue would no longer exist. India of course didn’t hesitate to launch their own nuclear arsenal onto Peking and Shanghai, initiating a radiated blood bath in Asia. In a move of dark humour China also sent two nuclear missiles onto Japan – allied to the U.S. —targeting the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

By this time, the United Nations no longer existed and humanity was facing other, more deadly challenges. The outbreaks of S.A.R.S and bird flu in the early 2000’s were small and insignificant compared to what the world had to face in the following years. In 2006, new and improved viruses started spread around the planet faster than any known pathogen in history. By the end of 2009, the contamination toll was superior to AIDS’ and malaria’s combined. There was no cure and no time to find out how the viruses worked. Humans died within two weeks and most animals survived for a month, carrying and spreading the airborne diseases indiscriminately.

World famine rapidly spread as people died and the food distribution networks failed due to lack of labour and livestock death. Malnutrition became inevitable, hospitals were full and became human slaughterhouses. Most doctors were dying and helping to spread the diseases due to their privileged exposure so people no longer had any health care. By the end 2010, there was no trace left of the world economy, credit had been exploded and there were no stocks left to trade on the markets. Poverty had taken over the world and violent anarchy was widespread.

This was the state of human chaos but Earth had more to offer. The 2004 tsunami and the 2005 hurricanes were drops of water compared to the showers that followed. Tectonic plates began to seriously move in 2006, provoking volcano eruptions and earthquakes on every single fault line of the planet for the following years. Cities, towns and villages were decimated within minutes. Climate changes became devastating with the appearance of hurricanes all over the continents and localized twisters becoming every day events everywhere. Every year the tectonic activity increased and to accompany this trend, the planet’s poles began to shift.

Our beautiful blue spaceship was moving so much that it lost its own balance. The poles' shift provoked accelerated melting of the icecaps and eventually flooded the coastlines of the world over incalculable altitudes. These unpredictable rotations happened in sequences of days in a row until finally in January 2013, the planet's poles stabilised again with the previous North and South Poles now on the Equator and Senegal being the new reference for the North Pole.

2011 and 2012 were the year of energy shifts, and of the "Organic Revolution". Dimensional portals started to open and energy from parallel universes was channelled onto this plane. Most humans were not prepared to withstand these bursts and the intensity of these beams killed many of us. The energy shifts were part of a DNA reprogramming of the different species of the planet bringing new possibilities and knowledge to people who had the opportunity to survive them.

With this channelling, a new leap in science was taken based on the usage of plants as a source of power. Electricity was generated from chemical combinations of wood, carbon, flowers and herbs. This leap also brought the advent of the pod, which came to be an all-encompassing tool, that functions as what we used to call a phone, computer, television, radio and internet terminal, a bit like a telepathic little bouquet with a screen, microphone and speaker. Since no patent was possible to apply to such an invention, its development was extremely rapid with improvements and upgrades appearing from everywhere. Information was now free, without control and became easily available. This allowed survivors to organise themselves into groups and tribes as the rest of the world was dying from the incessant energetic DNA reprogramming and of course the unending planetary chaos.

Towards the end of The Sneeze, days didn't have 24 hours anymore, the speed of the Earth's rotation was changing everyday and up to this day, still hasn't completely stabilized although most scientists and seers consider it to have completed 99% of this process. It seems that days will return to their

original length but a new time unit has been developed, days are now divided into twenty-two “phirals”. The orbit around the Sun has also varied and it will return to its original length but it has also not stabilized so we call years “orbits”. Months – today called “moons” —are calculated only by the moon cycle since it has kept its orbit stable around our planet and is now the only valid physical time reference that we have.

On December 31, 2012, the strongest interdimensional beam came down to the planet and literally wiped out the last remains of chaos. It was the end of the destruction. After that day, stillness and calm blossomed all over the world and survivors across the globe celebrated a new beginning.

The reprogramming process changed the whole structure of the planetary construct, bringing a new harmony to existence. The human species is no longer able to digest animal flesh and thus has become vegetarian with the ability to eat and retrieve nutrients from most of the plants on the planet. The human body’s main sources of nutrition are now chlorophyll and water.

We are free of all physical ailments such as cancer and sexually transmitted diseases, flu, colds, fever, viruses or any pathogens that might have existed before The Sneeze and our bodies are now adapted to withstand extreme temperatures and climates. Women only become pregnant when they so desire and when their partner agrees so the creation of babies now relies more on consciousness than the physical act of sex. These new “features” allow for a true and free sexual revolution, liberating old fears that were ingrained in the human psyche.

The connection to spiritual planes has become widespread and this has allowed for the structural change of social, emotional and relational thinking. Death is now understood and accepted as a part of life and thus easier to experience with detachment. Material accumulation is no longer the driving force of human personality, new paradigms of human interaction are being discovered and experimented everyday. What used to be taboo and unacceptable behavior is now accepted and incorporated into the new human experience.

With the advent of recent organic technology, the relationship to the

planet has become totally sustainable and moreover, productive. Since energy is now cheap and easy to create, the need for depletion of the planet's resources has entirely disappeared. This has allowed for a new relationship with the animal and plant worlds, bridging communication and understandings that have never before existed. Symbiotic evolution is becoming the planetary standard.

The most important realization from the reprogramming is that all humans are now aware that life on earth is an experimental game without any serious consequence. Time has been redefined as a momentary dimension and in this sense, we remind ourselves to live in infinity. Suffering is no longer an important issue, rather it is accepted as a natural process and viewed as an opportunity to experience new ways to evolve. Detachment and perspective are now part of the automatic thought structure, the frequency our brains has changed and we are now aware of electromagnetic energies, auras and pranic influence very easily.

A name has been given to our new species, we call it Homo Spiritus. Adults are children again, and the game of life is now easier to enjoy. The Earth has sneezed and is taking a new breath.

Of course, we do not live in Utopia and perfection remains an illusion, humanity still needs to dissolve remains of old patterns from the pre-Sneeze era and face arising challenges. The future lies in the discovery and in the creative reconnection of the spiritual knowledge with the material.

This discovery was the initial purpose of Encantada. I was part of the first settlers that arrived here to create an ashram whilst other friends who wanted a more artistic life created the village. Tony had had the vision that this part of the world would not only survive The Sneeze but also benefit from it so we trusted him and established our base here. The country at that time was called Costa Rica and even though volcanic activity and earthquakes would be frequent, we chose to live in the mountains due to the foreseen water level rising. The land was and still is extremely fertile just as pure water was and still is abundant to this day so the conditions for self-sustainability were ideal. We miraculously managed to survive The Sneeze with pure food,

without starving and without anyone getting contaminated but many didn't survive the energy shifts.

In 2013 with the advent of the pod, the word spread out that our haven was one of the places to rally and rebuild and since then, thousands of people have managed to travel up to here. We move around the world today with helicopters, powered of course by plant electricity. Aeroplanes require too much landing space so much work has gone into successfully making the helicopters larger, faster and silent.

Sounds are of course of great importance in the development of the fauna. If space were overtaken by artificial noise then humans would again be messing with the ecosystem. Most animal species have disappeared in The Sneeze and the remaining ones have more trouble than humans to adapt but mutations are happening everyday and new species are burgeoning like mushrooms.

Radical sways of heat to freezing winds with snow are experiences that no surviving species had ever undergone before so the weather variations are a major part of the challenge for all living beings but through symbiosis we are finding wondrous paths for co-existence and creativity.

This morning Venus and I take the time appreciate the opportunity to live these incredible moments and contemplate the simplicity of the Universe.

—Look Ragga! By the tree! An eight-legged lizard!



After our delicious breakfast we returned to bed, I didn't feel like going into the snow. The weather forecast on the pod announced heat and sun for the midday so I decided to stay with Venus until then.

I knew there was more to you than just fluff and softness" she laughs "whatever happens, I am here for you, you know that don't you?

—Yes.

—Good." She snuggles under the duvet and gently kisses the inside of



my thighs. A muffled voice comes out and says, “However dark you think you are, I will remind you of your light my love”. She then initiates a play of spectacular tongue, mouth and hands, as if she knew what Melissa had done and surpassed her with a class only imagined in dreams of heaven.

Suddenly all the game with Melissa became a teenage power struggle with a few extra accessories and I realized how right Tony was, again. I had wasted energy and time indulging in fantasies that had no longer any reason to exist in my life. However exciting and fun this journey into the power of anger could be, it was nonsense and Venus made me see this obvious truth.



Not so surprisingly, Sally wasn't in her room when I arrived at the cottage. I would have imagined that by now, Melissa would have lured her into more lustful pleasures.

Sally was lying down on the floor of my office, amongst the pillows. She looked at me in delight, as if she had been waiting all day for me to arrive. Melissa's head was between her legs and she hadn't heard me enter. I found the whole situation predictably amusing and let out a quiet giggle that reached her ears and provoked a reaction.

—Finally!” she gasped as she lifted her head, “Sally here has been waiting like a bitch in heat for you all day. Even though we've been having fun together, she likes to have big and hard one inside her, don't you Sally?”

—I do”, she says.

Even though the whole situation had a metaphorical resemblance to Charlie becoming the owner of Wonka's chocolate factory, a wiser voice came out from my mouth.

—I've changed my mind Melissa. I don't want to play anymore.

They both looked at me incredulously but Melissa thought I was very funny and laughed out loud.

—Have you lost your mind little boy?

—I'm sorry it has to be this way Melissa, but I made a bad choice

yesterday and I cannot do this with you.

—You don't seem to understand David, you're making a bad choice right now and you will do this with me.

—I don't want to argue Melissa. You're the one that came to me to be free of your anger. What happened between our souls a century ago has no relevance to our path today. We can only learn not to repeat the same patterns and go beyond the pain and suffering.

—My freedom depends on our exploration darling. Now fuck Sally before I really get pissed off.

—There is no need for you to lose your temper and I won't have sex with Sally. Please leave my cottage Melissa, you have a long journey ahead and I'm sorry we can't explore this together.

Melissa didn't think twice and started to chant incantations to invoke an entity called Baphomet. I had heard them once before in an astral journey with Tony, she was going to summon a demon to make me obey.

—Your spells will not work on me Melissa.

—Oh really?" she made herself choke and semen came out of her mouth. "You see little boy? This is what you gave me yesterday and now I will teach you what respect is. You gave me your word and I will not tolerate your little rebellion.

Sally didn't feel so good when she saw Melissa cough up my semen and fainted at the sight of a dark shadow that appeared between us. Baphomet was an imposing power indeed and Melissa fed him my semen as she gave him his orders.

—Baphomet, all-powerful, make this human stand faithful to his pact and punish him for his attempt to break his vow.

The demon flew into my body through my penis and rapidly expanded. I was being branded with red-hot iron, inside and outside, all my organs were burning. This was definitely not an ineffective demon but it was also not the worst magic I'd had to counter in my life. I could not speak or Melissa would interfere so I called him through a noosphere channel. It is normal for shamans and mages to have the ability to dissociate from the body's sense but

if I didn't hurry, he would rapidly access my mind.

Demons are very linear. They are simple thought forms and when one can reach them on their level with a non-dualistic idea, they become confused and useless so this is how I neutralized it. To finish the task, I exhaled all the air in my body and blew him into a clean vortex that I usually maintain at my window.

He was gone and Melissa couldn't believe her eyes. She stood with her mouth open, obviously expecting a different outcome.

—The breath is the most powerful magic Melissa. You may have thought me to be weak but I can dissolve any of your attempts. I want this to stop but if you keep going I will make you stop.

—You forget that our souls our joined David Salomon, I will haunt you until you bow to me again.

—That is easy for me to clean, your invasion was nowhere deep enough to create damage. You really have no idea of the freedom and power one lives after crossing the abyss do you? Did you really believe you could actually put a spell on me?

—Then forget having a private life with Venus! That woman is a walking invitation for possession! I'll be in your bed, in your kitchen, everywhere! You think you can get rid of me because you spooked off a demon? No chance little boy!

—I'm sure you won't want to mess with Venus. You don't know what you're up against. Melissa, please be reasonable, take a breath, sit down, have some tea and we'll walk away from this amicably.

—NO!

Her anger was so strong I could feel it inside me because our souls were still together. How could I have forgotten? If I could feel what she feels, I could make it work the other way round so I slowly sat on the floor and positioned myself in the lotus. I tuned into her energy field and emptied everything that appeared, emotions, thoughts, images, sound, all was being sent to the vortex. I would eventually find a space of emptiness inside her and send her prana to heal that space and transform the anger.

—What are you doing? I'm feeling weak David. Stop this!

It was working and I continued until she fell onto the pillowed floor, passing out unconscious. I now had a window to reach this saturated anger contained in her soul for thousands of years so I exited my body and entered her field to remove the stuck energy while inserting a clean flow to heal the wound. The operation lasted a few seconds after which I returned into my shell.

When Melissa woke up she took a few moments to understand where she was. She looked up at me and remembered what had happened but the look on her face made it clear that she was watching a movie that didn't make any sense. She was obviously confused and tired so I walked up to her and made her fall asleep by pressing my hand on the back of her neck.

This is normally not the way I work. It interferes with the self-realization of events and isn't always helpful to people but this case was obviously different. I would have to absorb and digest the energy I took out of her, probably making me ill for a few days but it was a cheap price to pay for my stupid decision. This game was over.



Sally and Melissa rested in the room for hours before they eventually regained their senses. It was already dark and I had lit a few candles to avoid flooding them with artificial light during their rest. The whole afternoon had been a roller coaster and I had been working in their dreams to reconnect all the missing links that would help us to keep moving forwards in our process.

Sally was the first one to open her eyes to the waking life. “What on Earth happened?” was the first thing she said.

—Not much really if one considers the insignificance of our size compared that to the Universe's...” We both laughed lightly and I handed her a glass of water that she was happy to drink from.

—I'm glad that someone could keep that in perspective. So what's

happened to her?

—She’s just asleep. You’ve both been out in space for quite a long time now.

—And what now? What happens from here? I was quite enjoying this orgiastic environment!” she laughs.

—I’m sure you’ll find someone else to dive into the realms of savage sexuality in which we now both know you excel.

—You know Ragga, it feels so good not be shy about this, it’s like a chain was broken. Thank you!” she throws herself at me and gives me a long passionate kiss, which I accept with friendly enthusiasm.

—The irony is that you’ll have to thank Melissa. I was just the penis.” The image of myself being my own sexual organ was so ridiculous to me that my laughter exploded into the air waking the black panther from her beauty sleep.

Melissa gently sat up and looked around, stretching her arms out in her feline expression. Her green eyes stood out thanks to the glow of the candles and made them appear to be two precious stones caught in a sculpture made of dark and shiny volcanic rock. She lazily crawled towards me and as she came close, lay down on the floor again with her head on my lap, looking at Sally.

—Thank you Ragga”, she said, “Tony was right, I have to find my own freedom.

There wasn’t much to say so I didn’t reply.

—Do you think that he can help me?

—I’m sure he already is helping.

We all kept silent for a moment until a bird came in through the window and landed next to us, a hybrid of owl and falcon. His appearance was so sudden that we all were startled and laughed together without end while the bird stared at us with an intrigued look in his eyes.

## FIVE

Inside Ragga's office, Dargan turned the table pod off and looked at Sally with intrigued eyes.

—It looks like he was writing a kind of autobiography. Did all of this happen Sally? I mean you and Ragga? And Melissa?

—Well, it did but he exaggerated a bit”, she said with a provocative smile, “we only did it twice that day after Melissa left, but I did ask for more.”

Dargan was evidently shocked by her honest cheekiness. He'd known Sally for years but had never been presented with such light-hearted comments about her sexuality. It seemed that in a few weeks she had metamorphosed from a caterpillar into a butterfly. All the contained sensuality had been released and she oozed an intense energy of confidence, showing her fine traits hidden for so long behind curtains of shame.

—Great, fine, wonderful. But that doesn't help us to know where they've gone now does it?

—You asked, I just answered”, she said giggling.

No one had heard of or seen Venus or Ragga in seven days. They disappeared without a trace, without anyone knowing what happened to them. Sally and Dargan had already searched for them in all of Encantada and it's surroundings but they were nowhere to be found. They've sent a signal on the pod network asking for news but of course, all around the world people are still looking for survivors of The Sneeze so it's one drop in an ocean of requests. All of Encantada has been informed but it seemed that either they didn't want to be found or someone else didn't want them to be found.

Neither Dargan nor Sally are very skilled at telepathy but they made an effort to keep their channels as open as possible, just in case. Melissa however, assured them that their friends were not in danger, as she wasn't receiving any signs from the noosphere. Even though Sally trusted Melissa who by now had moved in with her, Dargan maintained a cautious distance, especially after reading Ragga's notes.

## LONDON, UK, MARCH 13, 2006

Makerisna logged off the net without saying goodbye to Ragga, she was already late for her tap dance class and her students were always extremely punctual. This public relations day job made her quite unhappy and she longed to create her own dance studio, a dream she had held for many years now but she had to begin with classes in a crummy studio in Camden, hopefully finding a way to take it over and renew it completely.

Her parents weren't very open to her dream and insisted that she study law instead of going to a dance school. Like many children, she obeyed and dug a big part of her emotional grave trying to bury her rage and mask it with a master's degree in Fine Arts. She spent many years in the academic world and today finds herself in a job only to secure an illusion of financial stability. Like most people in the western world, she's caught in the rat race.

When Makerisna dances, she incarnates the goddess of electricity —if there were to be any —and floats effortlessly, tapping her rhythm into ripples of synesthetic colors. She was born to dance and realized this the first day she saw Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in *Top Hat* and imitated them in her parents' living room. At the time she was six years old and when her half Thai, half English mother caught her dancing she was amazed at the grace her daughter emanated. Her husband agreed to sign their daughter up for classes at the Hong-Kong School for Dance and thus unknowingly initiated the beginning of Makerisna's path to self-discovery.

Makerisna's father worked for the MI-6 and his cover at the time was to pass for an employee of the Hong-Kong government. He tried as much as he could to provide a discreet family life and avoided all frivolous activities, not even his wife could know his real job. Paul Harvard's mission in Hong-Kong was to ensure safe passage for operatives travelling between China and England but policies changed in 1997 when the colony was handed back to the Motherland so the whole family moved back to London.

Paul's services to the Crown had been outstanding and he was offered the option between a very well paid early retirement and working behind a

desk. His choice went for the early retirement and thus also encompassed the dangerous risk of becoming a target for quiet elimination. Like many field operatives, he had seen a number of situations that could compromise people around the world, regardless of their influence.

This risk was a difficult choice for him but he couldn't manage to contemplate the possibility of a routine job. He asked himself the question every morning, was it worth it? He knew he had smothered his daughter's dream but he justified himself by remembering it was for her own sake. If she were to become a famous dancer, all the family's safety would be in danger so it was better to make her walk a normal and quiet path. To this day, he hasn't forgiven himself for it and his daughter's unhappiness was like a knife turning in his bleeding wound. How could he explain this to her? He could only hope that one day, Makerisna would forgive him.

Ma invariably made men's heads turn around on the streets, often strangers would buy her flowers just for the pleasure of seeing her magical smile – and hopefully get her phone number. She was twenty-six now and her feminine powers had grown from girl to woman very quickly in the last couple of years learning how to make things turn to her advantage with just a flutter of her eyelashes. The reason she didn't like her public relations job is that it was too easy. Ma understood men's stupidity and women's jealousy very well and played with them with the ability of a master. She hadn't found a challenge in her life yet and her only drive was to dance, the only space where she could be herself without masks. And she was even starting to question that.

**Sud Ram** was born in London. He has lived in 9 countries and is currently based in Portugal. He maintains a blog at <http://sudram.blogspot.com>



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# Katrina

Jeff Mann

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My today is trifling. Small rain collapses  
across campus, cadets are kneeling mud,  
crushed beechnuts scatter August's sidewalk.

I buy three books at the Easy Chair,  
I study petulance when Bollo's lacks  
iced decaf. What is trifling is what is fortunate,

this far from sea. Today's soft storm,  
and, tonight, groan and tussle of oak boughs  
beyond the bedroom window? Oh, they are

mere camp-followers, dispersals. Here,  
what we hear's those last seconds  
of bass growling inside the piano, C-sharp

lapsing into silence, the lift of foot from sky-  
pedal. On my bookcase his statue rests, the god Thor,  
hunched over his hammer, weary with effort.

What has grandeur of such proportions to do  
with reason or reparation? The hammer shatters  
water, shatters mud. Is it not glorious

from this distance, that great dark eye moving  
across our nation, renovating, revising?  
Inside the brain, blood vessels break,

brown blood swamps the levees, the lamps  
go out. Where are they now, the kind ones  
whose names do not remain? What today wants

is to have them safely here, the maitre d' of Desire Oyster Bar,  
with his black-walnut skin and his white mutton chops,  
the Parisian dignity with which Sazeracs arrive.

Or his colleague, the warm waitress who brought  
fried oysters, and later, as we left, hugged us—  
entire strangers, two queer white tourists—

as if we were her own. The tiny Asian lady  
presiding over palmiers and Napoleons at La Marquise,  
the smiling moustached man flaming bananas at Brennan's.

My favorite stripper at Oz—honey-gold chest hair, goatee,  
nipple ring, barbed-wire armband tattoo—who allowed Platonists,  
for proffered dollars, briefly to glimpse, to touch the Ideal.

A hand slips from a hand, the gardenia is swallowed,  
dark water fills the wine glass, the crystalline skulls, the white oven  
of the tomb. Wasn't it loveliest on the edge, that long frenzy

of flowers, that steeped reprieve so close to God's river, God's sky?  
Who needed this theorem proved? The hammer's flash insists:  
No mercy for the brilliant. No quarter for the beautiful.

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# Shadow

Jeff Mann

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Among those concerned with immaculate documentation,  
with whether the toilet bowl will stain,  
what to type into the résumé, what language  
the computer speaks,

I am a column of smoke in the corner of a cellar bar  
at midnight, a trail of blood in the blue snow  
under spruce. I sit on headstones to watch  
the hawthorn drip, I strap the torso of a savior  
to a post and tear candle wax into black chest hair.

I am nothing but a shadow,  
but I am learning my own worth.

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## Winter's Grail

Jeff Mann

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Snow and night  
begin their fall together,  
and by midnight mountains

about the town are white.  
Great arcs of ermine,  
pale hide bristling with

the black fur of trees.  
Circle of hills, circle  
of crystalline houses,

and in the solstice-center  
of dark's greatest diameter  
and depth, a tractor-trailer's

heavy wheel rim, set  
on its side in the storm.  
Inside it a wood-fire's heaped,

shifting its smoke from wind  
to wind, sending up skirls of spark  
as snow's heavy sift bows

down the hemlocks. If you stand  
beside the flames, eyes aching with  
the waft of smoke, and gaze inside,

what you see is winter's grail,  
century's embryo, where every day  
to come is seething, where years uncoil,

faces flicker across orange oak-embers.  
Inside the cauldron, bones break into crimson  
blossom; the dead are consumed, then step out whole.

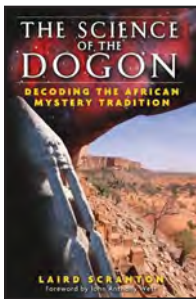
**Jeff Mann's** poetry, essays, and fiction have appeared in many literary journals and anthologies. He has published two collections of poetry, *Bones Washed with Wine* and *On the Tongue*; a book of personal essays, *Edge*; a novella, *Devoured*, included in *Masters of Midnight*; a collection of poetry and memoir, *Loving Mountains, Loving Men*; and a volume of short fiction, *A History of Barbed Wire*. He teaches creative writing at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia.

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# Sacred Mysteries of the Dogon

Review by Eric K. Lerner

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Dogon cosmology presents a rich and intricate genesis myth containing basic archetypes that recur in religious thought throughout history. God Almighty, Amma becomes self-aware and from Amma's egg issue forth particles that become matter. A trickster, Ogo, a fox, usurps Amma's creation, which is redeemed by the bloody sacrifice of a primordial human ancestor, the Nommo, who is resurrected so the evolution of man can continue.

Two French anthropologists, Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, in *The Pale Fox* and *Conversations with Ogotemmel* explored this sacred myth of Dogon culture in depth. Their work serves as inspiration for a pair of books by Laird Scranton: *The Science of the Dogon: Decoding the African Mystery Tradition* (Inner Traditions, 2006, 224pp, \$16.95) and *Sacred Symbols of the Dogon: The Key to Advanced Science in the Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs* (Inner Traditions, 2007, 272pp, \$18.95). Scranton argues that not only does Dogon cosmology echo better known mythologies, but that it precisely details specifics of modern scientific wisdom in oral descriptions and drawings documented by the French team.

Scranton may raise a few eyebrows because he openly admits that he has never experienced Dogon culture first hand. He is a computer programmer. In *The Science of the Dogon*, he writes "the most common task when writing a computer program involves the deliberate selection of symbols to represent concepts. For one programmer to successfully maintain the work of another,

he or she must first learn to identify the intended meanings of the other programmer's symbols. A good software designer also learns over time to incorporate clues to the meaning of a symbol into the form of the symbol itself." That may seem an incredible way to justify one's expertise to analyze a cosmology, but I find that aspect of his approach refreshing. Contemporary authors too often present books proclaiming authentic experience of esoteric realms that are little more than rehashes of obscure tomes. It's nice to read someone who is honest and gets his footnotes straight.

His base assumption is that similar symbols reflect similar truths. This should be applied to cross currents between science and religion, just as it has been between cultural belief systems. *The Science of the Dogon* elegantly applies this to Dogon cosmology. For instance, Scranton provides an example between Dogon symbolism and quantum physics. After elaborating how the Dogon describe the formation of the universe from the opening of Amma's egg and the elaboration of tiny seeds called "po," Scranton writes:

Clearly what is being spoken of...is the formation of the building blocks of matter-atoms and their components. So, when we suggest possible meanings for the Dogon symbols that are related to atomic structure, the idea is wholly and completely in keeping with how the Dogon understand their own symbols. (In *Dictinnnaire Dogon*, Genevieve Calme-Griaule describes the po as "the image of the atom.") However, if we look carefully, we can see that the surface story of the Dogon myth might also pointedly direct us to the concepts of quantum physics. Imagine for a moment that you must read an article written in a foreign language, that, for the most part, you do not understand. Then imagine the two words you do understand, supply and demand are repeated again and again within the passage. It would not take the insight of a genius to surmise that the subject of the article might be economics. The

Dogon creation story provides us with a similar clue to its meaning with its recurring emphasis on pellets of clay and spiraling coils. It requires only a little imagination to see these symbols as likely references to particles and waves—the essential building blocks of quantum theory...[Here, he inserts a quote describing the dual nature of quantum particles.] Within the creation story we can see an implied knowledge of the wave properties of physics when the Dogon say that the fibers of the first garment mimic the sound of the voice of the Nommo, which tapers off in spiraling coils—a statement that betrays an understanding by the teller of the creation story that sound travels in waves.”

Not only does he draw correspondences between oral stories and scientific rhetoric, but also he examines visual similarities between contemporary scientific diagrams and Dogon religious symbols. One of the best examples of this is his comparison of a drawing of the vibratory pattern of strings from Brian Greene’s bestseller *The Elegant Universe* and a Dogon field drawing of the emanation of 266 primordial signs used planting rituals. They are virtually identical. Scranton writes. “Together the Dogon field Drawing along with Griaule’s statement about the vibrational nature of matter firmly link the Dogon symbols to their counterparts in string theory.”

Scranton identifies numerous points of consistency between contemporary science and Dogon cosmology. Throughout, he presents Dogon myth and symbols and juxtaposes with them with contemporary scientific theories or diagrams. He summarizes his approach:

The coherence of Dogon cosmology is upheld by a sensible, well defined system of symbolic storylines whose themes directly mirror the best modern scientific theories of how the universe and matter might have actually come to exist. The myths express themselves clearly and succinctly,



so much so that the statements of the Dogon priests are often most easily understood in direct comparison with comparable statements from popular modern interpreters of science—authors of the caliber of Stephen Hawking, Brian Green and Richard Feynman. Our understanding of these statements by Dogon priest is guided and supported by important cosmological drawings that often appear in similar manner and take the form as related scientific diagrams.

An added value of *The Science of the Dogon* is that it makes an excellent Monarch Notes Guide to the latest scientific advances in Big Bang Theory, Quantum Physics, String Theory and DNA structure, particularly for those who may not be too inclined to pick up a scientific text. Indeed, while I was reading *Science of the Dogon*, I commented on the similarity between Dogon myth and String theory to an elderly santera, who was not formally educated. She asked me to explain string theory since she had heard it mentioned on television. I read Scranton's summary of String theory to her. She looked at me with some disappointment and said, "I knew that fifty years ago. I was hoping that it was something new." Her reaction illustrates one of the issues I have when the latest scientific theories are talked about in relationship to ancient non-white belief systems. Much of so called "high caliber science" simply seems to rehash sacred concepts to practitioners. I feel that Scranton's work is valuable in proving that.

However, Scranton is of the opinion that Dogon cosmology indicates that ancient culture had somehow acquired specific highly technical scientific knowledge, possibly even from an extraterrestrial source. However, there is an alternate way to interpret the overlays. I believe that this consistency between myths and scientific theories, ancient symbols and scientific diagrams represents a perception hardwired into the human imagination, the collective unconscious. Consistencies between Dogon cosmology (and other ancient belief systems) and scientific development express consistent problem-solving

approaches. They represent a thought process by which contemporary man experiences a basic urge to understand and systematize his place in the greater universe. This emerges from an integral level of consciousness to a symbolic level and eventually recollective level and thus contemporary man makes analytical symbols and statements consistent with his forefathers' truths. I do not believe that the Dogon or other ancient peoples received science lessons from an outside source. The Dogon used similar motifs to modern scientists, because they felt a similar need to come to terms with "the big picture." The imagery was embedded in their subconscious, just as it is in ours today. Like us, they thought and analyzed phenomena in a sophisticated, uniquely human manner.

Scranton does not limit his exploration of Dogon beliefs to their relationship to science. He explores how there are recurrent themes in Dogon myth and those in Judaic, Sumerian, ancient Egyptian and other ancient cosmologies. Sympathies between Dogon and ancient Egyptian beliefs receive special attention. In addition to mythic similarities, he compares the construction of Dogon granaries and Egyptian pyramid building in *The Science of the Dogon*.

The relationship between Dogon and ancient Egypt is expanded on in the subject of his next book, *Sacred Symbols of the Dogon*. Here Scranton emphasizes Egyptian hieroglyphs rather than Dogon cosmology in much of the book. In *Symbols* he concentrates on showing that Egyptian hieroglyphs codify String theory and Quantum physics, and that this forms a chain between Egyptian and Dogon culture. In most of the volume he illustrates parallels between symbols used by contemporary scientists and hieroglyphs. The Egypt material takes up more of the volume than Dogon.

Scranton cites Sir A.E. Wallis Budge as his primary source on Egyptian language in both books. Budge has fallen out of favor with contemporary Egyptologists primarily because of the phonetic values he assigned to hieroglyphs. Scranton bases his preference for Budge on the theory that Budge's phonetic values for ancient Egyptian language are similar to those in the still spoken language of the Dogon. Interestingly J. Olumide Lucas stated

a similar case for parallels between Budge's Egyptian phonetics and those of the Yoruba people, who like the Dogon, are of West Sub Sahara Africa, in *The Religion of the Yorubas* some 80 years ago. Lucas delineated how the Yoruba linguistically assimilated Egyptian god names into the names of their own orisha. Perhaps such similarity between Budge's phonetics and those of another West African people further validate Scranton's decision. (Budge in his study of *Osiris, Volume I*, argued that Ancient Egyptian beliefs permeated those of sub-Saharan Africa. He did not cite the Dogon and differed from Lucas in his choices of correspondences between Egyptian deities and orisha in many instances.)

Scranton outlines his approach:

We began with a well defined set of Dogon words and symbols, whose symbolic meaning were simply overlaid on matching Egyptian words and glyphs. The legitimacy of this process is borne out by the many persistent resemblances that color most other aspects of Dogon and Egyptian culture. Support for the soundness of this approach is also found in Sir E. A. Wallis Budge's *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*, which provides us with consistent validation of correspondences between Dogon and Egyptian words and symbols. *The Dictionnaire Dogon* by Genevieve Calame-Griaule also specifically validates Budge's definitions and pronunciations of Egyptian words that are similar to those in the Dogon language. So from the very start, we can be confident that our interpretations are based on cross-confirming set of independent sources.

The more we work with Egyptian glyphs and defining words, the more aware we become of a recurring pattern involving these glyphs and words. Although only a subset of Egyptian glyphs can be said to have a directly assigned phonetic value, examples how that this subset seems to

include many of the same glyphs that we believe define key components in the structure of matter. First among these is the flying goose glyph which we associate with atom—the counterpart of the mythological po of the Dogon. In Budge’s view of the Egyptian language, this glyph carries the pronunciation of “pa,” the same pronunciation as the Egyptian word pa, which means “to be, to exist.” There is a likely corresponding Egyptian god named Pau, who is defined by Budge as a “god of existence.” A similar relationship between the glyph’s phonetic value and a deity name appears with the oval glyph ..., which, based on its appearance in various Egyptian words can be seen as a symbol for proton, neutrons and electrons. Budge assigns a phonetic value of “seb” to this glyph, a value that is a likely correlate to the Dogon word sene. He defines a similar Egyptian word, Senu which refers to “a company of gods,”

Scranton excels in pattern recognition and makes cogent claims for similarities between Egyptian hieroglyphics and scientific symbols. He draws parallels between actual hieroglyphics and diagrammatic illustrations of quantum physics and string theory principles. He offers alternate definitions of hieroglyphs and compound hieroglyphs in which he finds such similarities.

Here I have a problem. He develops these meanings from the way the hieroglyphs appear and are vocalized in Budge’s hieroglyphic dictionary and their similarities to Dogon words, rather than the way they appear in use in papyrus and pyramid texts. He uses the Dogon cognate and its use to justify the new meaning he assigns, rather than show how the new meaning for the hieroglyph or compound hieroglyphs work in their native context. At one point Scranton suggests that his interpretations might be substantiated by an examination of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. To test the validity of Scranton’s thesis, I secured a facsimile copy of *The Book of the Dead* and

a couple of primers on Egyptian language. (I really hope Scranton has a piece of Amazon.com stock.) I feel that if he is going to argue that single and compound hieroglyphs held specific scientific meaning for the ancient Egyptians, he should be able to show these used in context where they make full statements of scientific principles he says they mean.

Trying to decipher hieroglyphic texts is involved and time consuming. *The Book of the Dead* (a.k.a., *The Book Of Coming Forth By Day*, the extant facsimile version being also called the *Papyrus of Ani*, a specific extant version housed in the British Museum) has its hieroglyphs arranged in columns arranged from top to bottom. In some cases they are read from left to right and in others from right to left, and they may be read in special cases bottom to top! (The scanning orders in which these are read vary according to the subject matter of the passage. They may also vary according to the competency of the scribe who was trying to make sure he squeezed enough symbols onto a given sheet of papyrus.) Also in some places the phrases and sentences are read horizontally left to right and right to left. Most extant ancient Egyptian documents seem to contain multiple examples of each type of scanning. Individual sections also contain puns should the reader wish to also read the text in one of the alternate scanning patterns. Plus the hieroglyphs resemble and embellish illustrations to which they appear in proximity. (Is it not pathetic the mind numbing activities the old and infirm find when trying to idle away their summer vacations?)

Hieroglyphs that Scranton redefines should logically appear in close proximity to one another in order to form meaningful statements together. In the *Papyrus of Ani* version of the *Book of the Dead*, there was only one small section concerning the transformation of the soul into various animal forms where enough of them appeared consistently in close proximity in such a manner to possibly do so. That is certainly not the majority of the text or examples of the cited hieroglyphs' uses throughout it. (Albeit, I was getting a little bleary eyed, and there are numerous criticisms of the *Papyrus of Ani* being as inferior textual rendition of an esoteric text.)

If Scranton wants to make this type of argument, he really needs to

show examples of how these selected symbols work together in a coherent manner in extant texts. Rather than show how the new scientific meanings he advocates are validated by contextual examples in their original use, Scranton focuses on showing how the potential Dogon cognates overlay scientific explanations in the correct logical manner. To prove that the ancient Egyptians codified complex scientific concepts in their language and that there exists an unbroken transmission between theirs and Dogon, he needs to show both! A likely consistency in phonetic values is not enough, particularly when that is also subject to disagreement. I respect the effort that he has made with hieroglyphs, but there are ample examples of complete texts that he could use to fully test his assertions.

It is tempting to be seduced by the glamour of ancient Egyptian artifacts and to use them to support your own rationales and values. Philosophers, writers and artists have done so since Plato's time. But the temptation to do so here leaves Scranton's case half-made. That undermines the integrity of his other thought provoking analysis. It is worthwhile to read Scranton's take on Dogon cosmology, especially *The Science of the Dogon*, which recognizes and analyses how complex concepts are given voice in a systematic manner by an African people. Scranton amplifies the important work done by Giraule and Dieterlen years earlier. I enjoyed reading *The Symbols of the Dogon*, and especially liked his analysis of the Dogon Nommo drawing and diagrammatic analysis of similarities between a Buddhist stupa and the Dogon granary. Here Scranton accomplishes what he does best, performing straight up interpretation from the perspective of an intelligent observer. However, he needed to do more work on hieroglyphics to justify the main thrust of his argument. He could have done that by providing contextual examples from primary Egyptian sources. Scranton is a lucid writer who articulates both scientific and cosmological concepts exceedingly well, and is transparent in his methodology. He amply demonstrates the skill set to perform such a demanding analysis, and I hope he continues further with his work.

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## Reviews

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**The Red Goddess**, Peter Grey

(Scarlet Imprint, 2008, 258pp, Hardback, £37)

*Reviewed by Mogg Morgan*

This is a beautiful, provocative, thought-provoking book, one man's journey in search of the obscure object of his desire—full of odd typography, robust, sometimes rough language and a £37 price tag. Using the latest research from books such as *Strange Angel*, *Love and Rockets* and *The Unknown God* the author blends his own narrative around that which he sees as the three pillars of the Babalonian mythos—Enochian Magick, Aleister Crowley and Jack Parsons. Thus one reads:

Eunuchs have been used traditionally to serve the Goddess, often as sodomitic dog priests. That name is not a slur but most likely comes from their dog position sex. These were important priests who served the ancient Love Goddess by sacrificing their reproductive power. They are no longer men. They cannot penetrate the mystery. I will not advocate the joys of self-castration or the smooth root of the Skopsie, but it is certainly one way to serve Our Lady. I prefer Magick with the balls to push shaft deep into the crimson petals of the Goddess.

Babalon is modern goddess, one of the most recent to emerge from the cauldron of serendipity. Even so, some, Peter Grey amongst them, would claim she has antique roots. She reemerged in the modern world via the writings of Aleister Crowley, who is also responsible for renovating the old English spelling as Babalon, which has a significant numerology of 156 as opposed to 165. For Babylon, is an ancient Mesopotamian city, the Bête Noire of the ancient Hebrews, and therefore a natural cipher for corruption and hubris in the strange apocalyptic end game of the Biblical New Testament. I'm talking of the Book of Revelation, a book that exerted a powerful influence on Crowley's imagination and one way or another figured large in his new Thelemic mythos.

The Book of Revelation is widely believed to contain much hidden and indeed Kabbalistic symbolism. So no surprise that the "anti-gods" of that book turn out to be, according to Thelemites, the true corrective of the modern age. The goddesses of ancient Babylon were Innana, Ishtar and Astarte. These are "Red Goddesses" in more ways than one—and possible role models for the modern woman who is powerful, self sufficient and above all sexual. Whether modern "scarlet woman" is, as Herodotus suggested, willing to give herself to any man for any small coin, seems unlikely these days somehow. So in as much as the author of Revelation was saying that it's the goddesses that really bring society down, Crowley and the Thelemites say the opposite.

Few would argue that Grey's Red Goddess is a Mesopotamian creation. Most of us accept Mesopotamia, as the "cradle of civilization" and the dispersal hub for many important things: writing, astrology, technology, religion, etc etc. I must admit my own dealings with "The Red Goddess" are in her Egyptian territory (see *The Bull of Ombos*). Grey devotes a short chapter to the exploration of her possible Egyptian roots, although this is maybe a clear example of where the works of the Victorian Egyptophile Gerald Massey provide an inadequate guide to the material.

As far as I know, Egypt did indeed benefit from early contacts with Mesopotamia before the rise of the Pharaohs (i.e. 4000BCE), but its main development was independent. So for example although writing may have



been invented in Mesopotamia, it was also invented quite independently in Egypt, presumably for the same imperative. The earliest reference in Egypt to the Semitic goddesses Astarte and Anat belongs to the reign of Thutmose c. 1500BCE, both love goddesses were married to ultimate “Red Bull” Seth. But my Egyptian “Red Goddess” has to be Hathor, a goddess as old as time, goddess of the cattle cult (hence the horns) she is indeed sensual, sexual and intoxicated. (See *Hathor’s Secrets*) When old man Ra is down in the dumps she lifts her skirts and gives him a laugh.

Having said something of the mythology of Innana et. al, Grey soon leaves behind the ancient world. I definitely wanted more info on Mesopotamian religion, as his analysis is consistently interesting and engaging. He then follows the tracks of the *Belle Dame Sans Merci*, through the writings of her numerous modern devotees, including John Dee, Marquis de Sade, Jack Parsons and indeed many a modern mage, including his own dealing with she who must be obeyed, which brings to mind the lines of the song “my knuckles are bleeding and my knees are raw.” This reworking of the Crowleyian material on the nature of the scarlet women is seen largely through his poetry and forms *The Red Goddess’* vibrant core.

Grey has no time for the post modern obsession with transgender and reclaiming the “blossoms of bone.” “Eunuchs” he tells us, “cannot penetrate the mystery.” But there again for me, Babalon might be like “post porn modernist” Annie Sprinkle—the love of whose life is famously the tortured Les, a female to male transsexual.

So all in all an interesting and provocative monograph; worthy I would think of some wider circulation. It might be that this first edition which is perhaps aimed at the “collector” for whom “the medium is the message.” Its white wibeline cover with red embossing is very striking; there are tipped in illustrations, one in color. And indeed interior text is black and occasional red. Even so I’d be happy to read it in a standard hardback “Starfire” mode or even a good trade paperback. But whatever way you read it, it’s definitely worth a spin.

*From Mandrake Speaks (mandrake-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).*

**The Beautiful Tendons: Uncollected Queer Poems**, Jeffery Beam  
 (White Crane Books, 2008, 143 pages, \$)

*Reviewed by Peter Dubé*



*The Beautiful Tendons* brings together over three and half decades of Jeffery Beam’s queer-centered and homoerotic verse. Not surprisingly, therefore, it offers a view into a poetic universe that feels simultaneously intimate and far ranging. Happily, it is a universe that, in this poet’s hands, is well worth getting to know. Beam, the author of several other print collections as well as an audio/spoken word work, clearly wants to claim his place in the lineage of Whitman with this collection. The work rings with the same vitality and enlarged vision of the possibilities of the body, of the erotic. It is marked by the same cult of the “wild” mystic and the same generous pantheism. Many of the poems crackle with fire: “DickEssence,” for example, whose celebrational catalogue of images circling around (as you might imagine from the title) the penis, has great strengths of metaphor managing to startle, charm and stir at the same time. In these lines, the cock becomes “a thousand million angels” and a “side-winder hissing at jubilant bladed cowboys” in turn. Moreover, if the mythological and religious invocations at the end of the poem feel a little too familiar, they close off the spiraling language of earlier lines with great economy. In other cases, the poems are smaller, quieter without losing power. In *Where Runs the Sap* the verse takes on stillness and surface tension that suggest both the limits of narrative and of feeling in its depiction of love’s anticipation:

The lover does not come to their campfire  
 to learn sorrow in match sticks and fading flame  
 He comes to learn abandonment’s sheer cliffs  
 The bottom of some gorge  
 Filled with darkness a hammer

## Tied to a dog's tail

In both the quiet and more vatic registers Beam's poems seem to work towards an openness, a kind of ecstasy—in the original sense of that word, a transport out of the body, here to a hypothetical space beyond the confines of ordinary language itself, since we dealing with writing. In their best moments, these poems do somehow or other manage to press against such limits, of sound, sense, imagination and when they do, sex and soul, landscape and language manage to come together with a kind of glittering joy. In other cases they almost do, and just once in while they fold into a sort of soft abstractness that is unfortunate as in, for example, “A Welcome to the Black Sun” and “His Penis” with its slipping sequence of flower and color references that faintly recall the most exasperating weaknesses, both sentimental and intellectual, of the “New Age.” Of course, it may be the fate of every ecstasy to be followed by a comedown.

However, great sections of the collection soar above such problems of focus by anchoring the surging rhetoric to concrete reference points. The sequence of poems on Von Gloeden's famous photographs comes to mind, which with its specificity, descriptive economy and deep, pervasive sense of longing, is one of *The Beautiful Tendons*' strongest moments. Indeed, these pieces suggest, given Beam's ability to tease fresh “information” from such familiar images, that he is particularly able as a poet of sensibility and visual response.

Work like the Von Gloeden sequence, and the more successful poems of pleasure and ecstasy are what one takes away from the pages of *The Beautiful Tendons*, and one remembers them for their energy and their audacity. Beam is poet of evident large ambitions and, to a significant extent he succeeds in achieving them.

**Rapture for Big Sinners: 66+6 Things to Do Before and After the Righteous Lift Off**, Ian Phillips

(Reverse Rapture, 2008, 80pp, full-color hardcover, \$12.95)



Feliz Rumpus, *Rapture's* satyr cum narrator, explains the Rapture to those who really need to understand it: “those left behind or those who just plain damned plan to stay behind.” I very much enjoyed Phillips earlier collection of literotica *Satyriasis*, and this work manifests the same devilish streak of humor. Here, however, it is craftily illustrated to create a visual piece that is far more entertaining than the simple sum of its extraordinary

parts. *Rapture* is an intelligent satirical send-up of the end of days disguised as a children’s storybook. A great Yule gift for the friends you know that will be left behind when the big day comes.

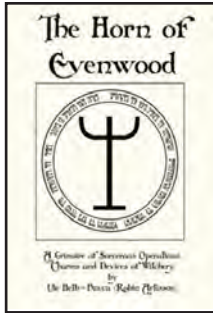
**The Complete Magician’s Tables**, Stephen Skinner

(Llewellyn, 2007, 448pp, hardcover, \$44.95)

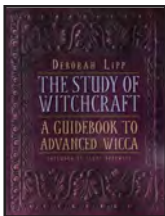
Correspondences have always been a key component of magical practice. Aleister Crowley’s *777* has long been the standard tabular reference for these occult affinities. Now Stephan Skinner has produced a compendium that goes many steps further, containing four times more tables than Crowley’s seminal work. Skinner draws on classic grimoires as well as the work of Peter de Abano, Abbott Trithemium, Albertus Magnus, Cornelius Agrippa, Dr. John Dee, S. L. MacGregor Mathers, Thomas Rudd and others. The cover’s claim to be “the most complete tabular set of Magic, Kabbalistic, Angelic, Astrologic, Alchemic, Demonic, Geomantic, Grimoire, Gematria, I Ching, Tarot, Pagan Pantheon, Plant, Perfume and Character Correspondences,” though sounding of hyperbole may not be far off the mark. This is a truly remarkable reference book that, I suspect, will prove as indispensable for many magicians as Crowley’s. Well worth the ticket price!

**The Horn of Evenwood**, Robin Artisson

(Pendraig, 2007, 172pp, hardcover, \$21.95)



I appreciated Artisson's earlier book, *The Witching Way of Hollow Hill*. Though at times rambling, his debut possessed a raw intensity and effectively conveyed a wide swath of material. *The Horn of Evenwood*, subtitled "A Grimoire of Sorcerous Operations, Charms and Devices of Witchery" and also called "The Master's Book of Conjury" or "The Witchfather's Bloodless Bones," is not as far-ranging as its predecessor. It is, however, a much tighter work for being more focused. Drawing on the meme of British traditional Craft, Artisson has produced a truly unique and exciting modern grimoire. His writing style continues to be evocative and poetic without falling off the precipice of medieval recreationist flourish. Artisson covers everything from the inner mysteries to wortcunning (herb lore) and includes several original (and highly practical) ritual workings including ones entitled: "Biting the Tongues of Serpents," "Summoning the Witch-Dream by Moth Flight," "Binding the Lovers One to the Other," "The Fruitful Working of the Womb-Seed" and "A Pavis from Foul Imprecations." I know that at times Artisson's persona has caused no small amount of controversy online, but his books are first-rate and novel editions to the milieu of Craft literature.

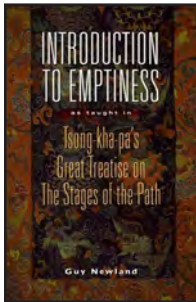
**The Study of Witchcraft: A Guidebook to Advanced Wicca**, Deborah Lipp (Weiser, 2007, 176pp, \$16.95)

Longtime practitioner Deborah Lipp's *Study of Witchcraft* offers more than the standard Wicca 101 course. Though maybe not a complete Master's degree, as the backcover claims, the book certainly constitutes a complete graduate level course in the roots and development of modern

Witchcraft. Lipp presents a sound history of the Craft with original insight into the diverse threads of modern Wicca (traditional, eclectic, radical, solitary). Her analysis of the influences that assisted in the development of each is worth the read alone. The annotated reading lists included with each chapter are particularly helpful in assisting (and encouraging) further exploration. Also included are practical exercises for spur the reader on to deepening their practice.

**Introduction to Emptiness As Taught In Tsong-kha-pa's Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path, Guy Newland**

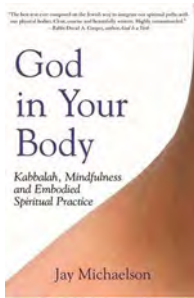
(Snow Lion, 2008, 126pp, \$14.95)



The concept of Emptiness, the heart of Mahayana Buddhist teaching, is one of the most difficult to grasp. Fathoming the notion of the two truths, relative truth and the ultimate truth of the emptiness of all things, is vital to understanding the theoretical underpinnings of Buddhist practice. Guy Newland edited Snow Lions three-volume translation of Tsong-kha-pa's classic work *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*. In his discussion of the nature of emptiness, he often goes back to Tsong-kha-pa's work for elucidation. In addition to the classic Tibetan text, Newland ties in many contemporary examples that assist in his task of making emptiness comprehensible. A definite book for anyone interested in understanding Buddhism to add to his or her library.

## God In Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice, Jay Michaelson

(Jewish Lights, 2006, 247pp, \$18.99)



Jay Michaelson is the editor of the Jewish thought and culture journal *Zeek*. I've long been an admirer of Michaelson's work, since it first appeared in *Ashé* with "The Erotic Mikvah." We also worked closely together when he guest edited issue #5.4. *God In Your Body* is a provocative work within which Michaelson argues for the mystical union of the spirit and the body. Michaelson writes in his introduction: "The body, independent of the heart's stirring and the misgivings of the intellect, is the site of holiness; even if there is no apparent change in the mind, and no softening of the heart, transformation takes place within the field of the body. This is not consolation; it is liberation." This book presents an analysis of the body in Jewish spiritual practice drawing on traditional texts and rituals, as well as bringing in meditation and mindfulness practices. He blends his grounding in traditional Jewish material with frequent references and exercises drawn from other contemplative traditions, such as Buddhism and Sufism. Michaelson's work also effectively draws in strong influences from contemporary culture. Any book that mentions both Michel Foucault and William S. Burroughs within paragraphs of each other is destined to make my short-list of must reads.

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## Boundaries

Lupercus Pagani

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Spectral head of Terminus upon  
Stone pile, fence post, or obelisk,  
You rise alert to mark the end of what is  
Mine  
And what is  
Theirs  
A border we dare not cross  
Without a weapon in hand  
Or a dishonest heart

Silvanus with a sharp knife  
That prunes the forest back,  
You allow us to trespass  
Into your wild realm for  
Seed, fruit, or meat

Lusty ass-eared Faunus,  
Wolfish in movement and thought,  
You purify us from the city's dirt,  
Whisper the future in rustling leaves,  
And guard the kids who graze your hills



Strike us with  
Pine branch,  
Goatskin,  
Or cock

Make us scamper like frightened children  
Back behind the walls of a cultured life  
And the boundaries of a rock

**Lupercus** is a 34 year-old gay pagan who has chosen to remain out of the spotlight. Among other things, he is a writer, photographer, and witch. Lupercus means ‘He Who Wards Off The Wolf’, which is thought to be another name for the Roman god Faunus. Lupercus can be reached at [lupercuspagani@yahoo.com](mailto:lupercuspagani@yahoo.com)