

Mysterious Ways

A newsletter for Pagan men who love men.

Summer / Fall 2020
Volume 1, Issue 2

Welcome to the Mysterious Ways

Wow! So much has changed since I published the first issue of Mysterious Ways back in early February. The U.S. and the world has been in lockdown due to the Coronavirus. Many of us are working from home. Wearing masks and social distancing has become the norm. Pagan gatherings, Pride events, and other events have been cancelled or postponed. Joe Biden is the Democratic candidate for the 2020 elections, and Bernie Sanders has endorsed him. One thing that hasn't changed is that Donald Trump and Fox news are still there spouting their lies and misinformation. On top of that, conservatives have been out protesting stay at home orders. Just a few years ago weren't many of them calling for peaceful protestors to be jailed? Now protests for Black Lives Matter.

It's a new day and age. Things may not get back to normal for a long time, if ever. Some folks are calling this the start of a new age where people, social justice, and climate change take the lead over capitalism and greed.

It's more important than ever to take a stand and to vote. — Mel Mystery

Themes this Issue:

- “The Intersection of Spirituality and Activism”
- “Coronavirus and your Spiritual practice”



Looking for signs related to the Coronavirus while hiking in a local park, I discovered this skull with a briar growing through it.

Briars represent protection and protecting ourselves. The skull represents death, but also a chance for rebirth and renewal. The skull appeared to be from some kind of rodent—possibly a squirrel.



Get out and Vote!

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In memory of George Floyd and all those who have suffered at the hands of an unjust system.

Coronavirus and Your Spiritual Practice

Coronavirus and Rites of Passage

By Mel Mystery

We are living in a liminal time right now. At the time of this writing, most of us are in varying degrees of lockdown over the coronavirus. It doesn't matter whether we are following stay-at-home orders or made our own conscious decision to self-isolate. The world is a different place that it was just a few months ago – we're staying home, many of us are working from home, events are cancelled, and non-essential businesses are closed. Even going to the grocery store can be scary. Many of us live in fear of contracting the virus or that our loved ones might get it. Contracting the virus could be a death sentence or if we're lucky we may get the virus but remain asymptomatic. We don't even know how long it will be until we can safely congregate again. In addition to the health fears, some of us are experiencing financial problems right now. With many non-essential business operations suspended, some folks have been laid off and are struggling to make ends meet.

Nothing prepared us for this. That's what rites of passage are usually for – to prepare us for big changes and transitions in life. Rites of passage give us the tools, skills, and mental attitudes necessary to navigate the changes ahead. We didn't get a rite of passage for this. In the absence of formal rites of passage, life usually presents us with challenging circumstances whether we want them or not, and especially when we aren't prepared for what's to come. The reason we didn't get a rite of passage for this pandemic is because this pandemic IS the rite of passage.

We are currently experiencing multiple rites of passage simultaneously.

We are experiencing rites of separation. We've been separated from our normal everyday world. We've physically separated from our normal workplaces. We've physically separated from friends and family. We've separated from the "normal" world of just a few months ago.

We are experiencing rites of transition. The world post-coronavirus will likely look different from the world before. People will be more reluctant to go to crowded places and events. Masks and hand sanitizer may become a fact of life. We may adapt our lives differently with everything from how we shop to how we socialize. During this time, we must also confront the ultimate transition – death. It could be our fear of death, the death and grieving for the "normal" pre-corona virus world we left behind, or even our own physical death or that of a loved one due to this virus.

We are experiencing rites of incorporation. Before the coronavirus hit, our country was very divided along political and religious lines. While this is still the case for some, the pandemic has brought many people together against a common enemy that knows no doctrine or dogma. Since the whole world is affected by this virus, many of us are realizing we are part of a larger collective whole that is bigger than artificial boundaries and divisions we've created for ourselves.

We are experiencing rites of purification. We're all practicing more stringent handwashing and sanitizing our spaces. We're wearing masks to prevent infection. Collectively we're trying to purify ourselves of this virus by slowing its spread, and medical professionals are trying to find an effective vaccine or treatment for the virus. Many of us are using the time to organize our closets, garages, and other spaces. That's a form of purification too.

We are experiencing rites of fertility. Some have suggested a post-coronavirus baby boom. What else have heterosexual couples got to do while in isolation? But fertility isn't just about procreation, it's also about creativity and expression. Many of us are using this time to better ourselves, to learn new things, and to create art and music and blogs and oh so many things that we didn't have the time for just a few months ago.

As with all liminal times, we are forced to confront our ourselves, our fears, our shortcomings, our weaknesses, and our shadows. We confront these things individually and collectively and in the systems that we have in place. What comes after coronavirus is yet to be seen, but what we're going through now will help prepare us for whatever is yet to come.

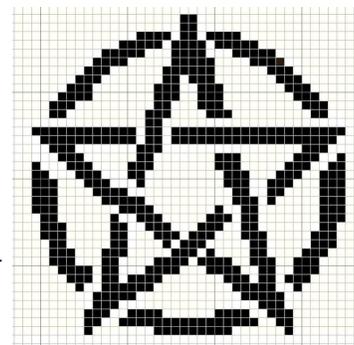


Doing it Digitally

by Mel Mystery

In this time of pandemic, many of us are doing “it” digitally. Doing what exactly? Well not what you were thinking. We’ve been bringing our Paganism online while under quarantine. This is not necessarily a new thing, but we are doing “it” in new and exciting ways.

Online Pagan groups have probably been around at least since dial-up bulletin board systems (BBS) in the 1980s and 1990s. According to Douglas E. Cowan, in his 2005 book **Cyberhenge**, Pagans even held online text rituals in chat rooms in those early days. In those rituals, candles were represented by the actual word “candle” and the quarters were called via different people chiming in with text. He suggested that successful online rituals were rare, but also felt they were underutilized.



The 2000s brought us Yahoo groups and Google groups which were later replaced by Facebook groups and other social media. The problem with many of these online groups is that there’s usually very little personal investment from members and some people are just there to share their naughty bits. Besides online groups and rituals, there have been online Pagan classes and workshops. Of course, there are also Pagan podcasts and video channels.

Many virtual expressions of Paganism, such as good online rituals, have been limited in the past by technology and bandwidth limits. In 2020, we have the bandwidth for multiple people in our homes to stream Netflix 24/7, and we have technology like Zoom and Facebook Live that allow folks to stream quality live video from our phones and webcams, and even to interact with the folks watching. I lost my virtual “virginity” this past Beltane weekend when I attended my very first online ritual hosted by John Beckett – a Druid writer for Patheos.com. I also attended the Thorn and Moon Virtual Beltane Festival. The festival included workshops, music, vendors, their own ritual, and even a “witchy drag show.”

While I look forward to a time when we can all come together again and do it in person, I hope we can continue to do it online sometimes too.

Arcadia and the Space Between us

by Mel Mystery



When we chose the theme last Fall for this coming October’s Arcadia Gathering, little did we know that the theme would take on a deeper meaning in 2020. Our theme this year is “The Space Between Us – Making Connections Across the Void.” When we envisioned the theme, we were thinking of the physical distances between many gay and bi Pagan men who often only come together as a community in online groups and offline gatherings; we were thinking of the difficulty many gay men have connecting with other men on a personal level; and we were thinking about the need of many to connect with deities, guides, and ancestors across the veil. In 2020, we are isolated physically by social distancing orders, so this summer there is even more metaphorical space between us.

As of this writing, Arcadia 2020 is moving forward. While this could change depending on where the pandemic stands in late summer and early fall, we are hopeful. By October, many of us will be looking for safe ways to reconnect again in person. Arcadia will be one of these spaces. If you missed your regular spring and summer Pagan gatherings this year, consider attending Arcadia in the fall. We will be taking extra measures to ensure your safety. For details, please see the Covid 19 Statement on our web page.

This year we are happy to host the Arcadia Gathering at the Arcadia Sanctuary in Amherst County, Virginia. Workshops and activities will explore the “space between us.” Our patron deity this year is the Greek God Hermes. We are hoping to have news of a special guest presenter later this summer.

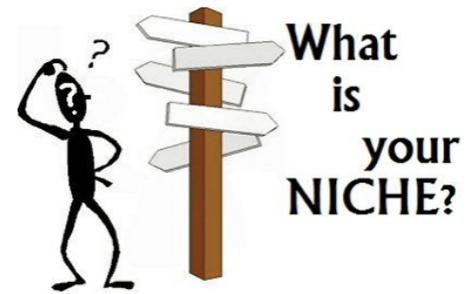
To find out more about the Arcadia Gathering and to register, please visit:
<http://www.olympuscampgroundresort.com/index.php/events/arcadia>

General Articles

Niche is Natural

By Mel Mystery

Niche has always been a thing and probably always will be. Niche has been a thing since the earliest days of humanity when we segmented into hunters and gatherers - where some folks hunted for meat and others gathered fruits, berries, and nuts. Both were necessary for our survival. Later on, we segmented further by adding healers and shamans, farmers, blacksmiths, artists, poets, warriors, priests, politicians, and personal injury lawyers. Such is the rise of civilization. The 20th century brought us bowling leagues, book clubs, and volleyball leagues. Then came gay bowling leagues, gay book clubs, and gay volleyball leagues. Then we segmented into LGBTQ+ — one community made of many smaller niches. These niches existed already, but there was a need to raise awareness of each distinct group and each group had distinct needs within the whole.



There are some models of the universal Divine that suggest everything and everyone were once part of the same monolithic consciousness. In order to stave off boredom and to explore all the possibilities of being, this one consciousness split into many types of consciousness — the great diversity of plants and animals; different genders; different races; different deities and types of spirit beings; perhaps even life on other planets. The thought is that once everything that needs to be learned is learned, these consciousnesses will eventually return back to source. According to many spiritual leaders, the lesson that we all must learn is to love each other and to respect our differences. The Vulcans in Star Trek had a name for this — IDIC. IDIC means Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations. We're all unique and different, but we're also all the same.

Paganism is largely individualistic. We resist dogma and the idea that one size fits all. We resist the idea that there is only one way to believe, one way to be, or one way to perceive the world around us. Many of us are pantheists. Instead of believing in one monolithic deity, we believe in a plethora of distinct and unique deities and other spirits who might interact with us all in different ways.

Some folks out there have this idea of one “universal” truth, one “universal” religion, one “universal” way of being that should fit everyone. Some of these folks — whether they be misguided idealists at one extreme or hate groups at the other — see “difference” as the root of all evil. Hate groups want to eliminate difference by eliminating those who are different (or at least put them on the other side of a big fence). Some idealists want to eliminate difference by making us all the same. They seek a world where differences are nullified -whether this be religion, gender, race, politics, or other distinctions. Both extremes will never be happy (unless some new world order imposes their will on the rest of us), because ever growing differentiation and specialization seem to be part of the natural course of the universe — whether by divine choice or by natural laws. Niche is natural.

It is natural to value and explore our differences and our uniqueness. The dark, shadow side of all this are folks out there who instead of exploring and celebrating their uniqueness in a good way, use that difference to fuel hatred against those different from themselves. For me, the problem with “straight pride” days isn't that they are celebrating their uniqueness as heterosexuals, but that they are promoting hate toward those who are not like them. A real straight pride day would honor mothers, fathers, and grandparents — after all what better symbolizes heterosexuality than procreation. In fact, we already have official straight pride days like Mother's Day and Father's Day and that's really okay with me. Instead of the generic “white pride” which is really about hate toward non-whites, how many white people celebrate their Irish, Icelandic, or European heritage in good ways without hating on other people.

I think it's okay for folks to come together to honor and celebrate their differences in good ways. This includes Pagan men who love men coming together for discovery, personal development, and spiritual purposes even though we may sometimes get flak from the idealists in our communities who want to see a gender-neutral world. We all search for our own unique truths and our own diverse tribes. As population on the Earth continues to grow and as technology makes connecting even easier, I suspect niches will continue to grow. Whether this be for better or for worse is yet to be seen.

Arcadia 2020

“The Space Between Us—Making Connections Across the Void”

A Camp OUT for Queer Pagan Men

October 8-11, 2020

Amherst, Virginia

www.olympuscampgroundresort.com/index.php/events/arcadia

Niche Post-Coronavirus Shutdown

I wrote the previous article “Niche is Natural” just before the Coronavirus hit the U.S. As early as last summer, I had noticed some chatter online (especially in reference to the ending of PantheacCon) that future Pagan gatherings will be smaller, more decentralized, more local, and niche. Now I’m seeing the same general kinds of trends mentioned as likely safety measures once Coronavirus stay-at-home orders cease. While big events and gatherings (Pagan, LGBTQ, or other) are great, many people will be concerned about their health and safety in large crowds until a vaccine or effective Coronavirus treatment is found. Even after a vaccine or treatment is found, many people will be reluctant to attend large events for fear of the next big pandemic. Online groups and events are taking off while we stay at home. Once we get back to the outside world, it will be the smaller, local and niche groups and gatherings that will attract people’s attentions. Niche is not only natural, it may be the new normal for some time to come.

Green is Gay

by Mel Mystery

You may have heard the expression in school never to wear green on Thursday because that makes you a “queer” or a “fairy”. What seems like a cruel made up children’s game to identify gay people actually underscores a long history of the color green being associated with gay men.

The term “fairy” has long been a term used to identify gay men. Its use has been largely derogatory, but some gay men have reclaimed it. In the book, **Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds**, by Judy Grahn, the author points out that green was the primary color worn by mythical fairies, and this connection ties into this tradition. The fairies have freer sexual morals than Christian cultures are comfortable with. In fact, given their extremely long, perhaps even immortal lives, the idea of eternal marriage and coupledness would only give way to boredom. So homosexual bonds were likely to have been acceptable. The color green is a useful color for mythical fairies because it helps them to blend in and remain hidden in their natural environment among the plants and trees.



As for the connection with Thursday, Thursday was considered by some to be “Fairy Day”. There is an additional connection to Thursday with medieval witches. When questioned under torture about their practices, some witches confessed that they practiced different sexual rites on different nights, and Thursday was the night associated with homosexual rites.

But the association with the color green and homosexuals goes back even further. **Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit** has more to say on the color green. At Ephesus, the transgender and often homosexual priests of the goddess Artemis / Diana wore garments of scarlet, violet, saffron, and yellow-green. In ancient Rome, green and especially yellow-green was associated with male gender variance and especially the passive role in male homosexual acts. These men were called galbinati, and are mentioned in Martial’s Epigrams. Martial talks about how these soft, effeminate men garbed in green lie on purple couches while being fanned by other men using red feathers. It sounds like the good life to me, but Martial criticizes their morality as being quote “grass-green.”

In pre-Modern France, bisexual and homosexually inclined courtiers called mignons wore green as the primary color in their tights, along with yellow or red. Often one leg of their tights would be green and the other yellow, and they might have a red cape. Their costumes were derived from three sources — the costumes of traditional troubadours, the costumes of fools, and the costumes of the legendary fairies.

Because green was associated with the margins of society, it also became associated with heretics who carried a green cross in their ceremonies.

Green was also a signifier of homosexuality among British poets. The association of the color green with homosexuality survived into the 19th Century and may even have been reclaimed at that time. A green carnation was adopted as a kindred symbol by Oscar Wilde and the English Decadents, and during the same time a band of men in Paris wore a green cravat to signify their homosexual inclinations.

So as you can see, the color green has a long history of associations with homosexuality, fairies, and magick. Wear it proudly — especially on Thursdays.

A New Concept of the Celestial Gaia

by Pelopidas

Gaia taken from Gê (Attic) or Gā (Doric) meaning 'Earth' is most often associated with an Ancient Greek Earth Mother Goddess. Female Goddesses were the vogue back then but I want to put forward a new concept for a non sexual Universal Divine Spirit which I will give the same name to in deference to the planet and universe in which we all live and to which we owe stewardship especially in these dark times.

In this I am sure there may be those who will say that I am just making up an amalgam deity based upon my own needs, but, I hope, once you have read this short paper, that you will see some sense in why I am putting forward this particular faith.

When I was younger I loved the 'Foundation' books of Isaac Asimov. Science Fiction is always a good read with adventure and mystery woven into a good story. The 'Foundation Series' although originally only three books (**Foundation, Foundation and Empire, Second Foundation**) gradually grew to a large number of books and in some of the later ones the idea of a planet and society where everyone, life and substance had within itself an awareness which was linked to everything else was put forward. Asimov called this Gaia and saw it (through fiction of course) as a natural maturity point for all life and inanimate matter in the universe. It was not put forward as a religion and had no deity but it set me thinking.



I was, at that point in my life, seeking like never before. Christianity was sadly lacking and the more I studied the more bigotry, hypocrisy and error I found within it. By extension this also applied to other main stream faiths too. It was the beginning of a path which led me to Unitarian Universalism and an appreciation of Pagan belief structures. I surmised: I have always felt an inner spirit in all things whether humans, animals or plants. This inner spirit became, to me, what God meant. God was not a male deity sitting on high judging or benefitting the people of the world. Nor was God a female deity in the same role. God was, in fact, not God at all. My thinking turned to an essential 'Spirit' which inhabited all things and provided the glue by which all matter in the universe(s) was connected.

The works of James Lovelock (also taking the name Gaia) seemed to provide a scientific evidence for the self regulating Earth in which nature and natural forces sought and seek to regulate the present and future. I am not certain if Lovelock ever took this beyond a sort of 'self awareness' for our planet but his ideas were refreshing to those feeling that personkind had become a dictator in the world not listening to what the heaving lungs of Earth were plainly saying. Business, greed and the love of money never see the true value of anything!

So, in the past couple of years, I have looked within and found that my faith was truly Pagan in nature; a profound response to the many crises facing the world of the present and of the future. My answer, and at present this may be just mine although I wonder if others have come to the same conclusion, is a Universal Spirit Deity which I name Celestial Gaia. This Spirit Deity has taken many forms in the past. It is inherent in many religions and faiths which have then become corrupted by man/woman made rules which sought to promote the greed for wealth and power of those leaders, priests(esses) and theologians involved. Why would I think this you may ask? Well, ponder these few things:

In orthodox Christianity the belief structure maintains a tripartite trinity of father, son and spirit in one God whilst pleading the case for monotheism. I will not go into the arguments against Jesus being anything but 'a son of God' but it is the concept of trinity which is interesting. It is like holding an amethyst crystal in your hand. You might equate different faces of God with different facets of the crystal and, perhaps, this makes it easier for Christian theologian apologists to accept non-consistent beliefs into unification of belief. What they think does not bother me. What I wish to show is that different emanations of the same deity can happen and be given different names and have different worshippers. Thus various Ancient Greek Gods may have represented different aspects of another God. Indeed the names of deities changed over time but the essence stayed the same. For instance Zeus became Jupiter to just give one example. Suppose then that all deities, without exception, are facets of the same Universal Spirit and that this Spirit is present within all things but given different form and names corresponding to the particular need. This, surely, is a prime basis for Pagan belief with its emphasis on nature, spirit and magic?

Celestial Gaia allows for any individual's path to faith to be achieved without friction. If you call Gaia Buddha or Thor makes no difference at all but the recognition of how we abstract our belief into day to day practice allows you to call your essential 'guide' what you like whilst still knowing how the 'core' is, in fact, nameless, sexless, & genderless. This is my core belief structure I offer up to all.

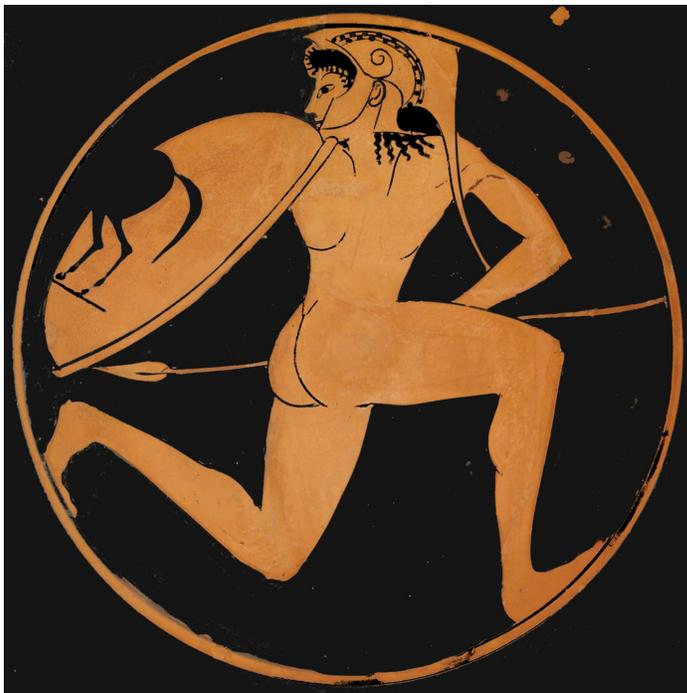
The realisation of an inherent spirit within all things makes for a realisation that we cannot simply blame the world's ills or cruelties on a creed or rule. The responsibility is purely personal within each one of us. This should lead to more appreciation of the world and cosmos we inhabit, our relations and behaviour towards other humans, animals, plants and other non living parts of our world and universe. It also leads to a rejection of creed or rule which was conceived out of greed or hatred. A release from so called moral re-

straints set out to make others unequal and which lead to oppression and maltreatment even if this is just in attitude.

Celestial Gaian believers will strive for fairness, equality, love and above all to know sense rather than irrationality. They will believe in many names of Celestial Gaia but they will share an inherent essence of what it is to 'know' Celestial Gaia.

I will give you one aspect of this I foresee. It is merely one and reflects my own situation so forgive. I am gay. For much of my life I had to be who and what I am in secret for fear of intolerance at best and physical abuse at worst (remember young Matthew Shepard). So, when others tell me that all that is behind us now, I do not believe them one iota. Prejudice will always permeate the world and cause distress and harm. It must always be fought against. For a long time I felt that my deity hated gay people and that was why my life was so unaccepted because the believers were only reflecting what their faith told them was true. I do not believe that now. Celestial Gaia has no favourites; no chosen few. It sees the 'truth' in all despite themselves and can see other causes for which the creedal laws are used as excuses. Consider the concept of mob rule. In most times people can find a semblance of rationality in their day to day life. However in times of stress and grief, such as now with Covid19, they will band together in mob views which are extreme. Sub groups are to blame they will state. Minorities like trans people, gays, Jews, Islamic sub faiths, foreigners, name them as you like, they are used to vent mob anger, frustration and unhappiness because it is better than looking inward and seeing the truth. Celestial Gaia sees through this fog.

I believe, as George Cecil Ives did in the late 19th Century when he formed his Order of Chaeronea, that things (and here I am not just citing gay rights) will not get better unless people fight for change, and then, change for the good of all Earth. This is why I agree with Mel in his seeking to form a brotherhood of Pagan gay men. I also am doing this from my own perspective; it is like the crystal again where facets lead to the same thing but give choice of approach. My concept will be forthcoming in the coming months and go by the name of the Brotherhood of Chaeronea. It will have Celestial Gaia and Gaian ethics at its core but will be a brotherhood for pagan gay men of all facets of pagan belief. It will have aspects of Ancient Greek and Norse faiths under an umbrella of a Gaian essence. It will also recognise something that, perhaps, we have lost; an appreciation of sexual aspects of ourselves without judgement. I read a chapter of a book recently that exemplified this very well. It pointed out (and I might add this article was not particularly gender based) that humans have lost that appreciation of the body and of the physical concept of sex. It tried to show the sensuality of everyday things like the feel of water or touch on skin. It showed me that moral dictates have made us afraid of even talking about sensuality never mind actually feeling it in practice. So, I make no excuse that sexual contact and discussion/support are also core parts of my Brotherhood. On the other hand it is not essentially an orgy organiser either. It would seek to enhance our use of sex in our own lives and in ritual to gain and not to lose, to enhance rather than diminish. The Brotherhood would also equally promote the study of Pagan faiths and sexuality in order that member brothers gain a better knowledge base and appreciation of the beliefs of other gay Pagan men.



I commend these thoughts and plans to you all. If you wish to contact me please do so by emailing me at boeotia@protonmail.com .

Be at peace, be in love, and be safe in the darkening world we live in.

Pelopidas

Submission deadline for the next issue of Mysterious Ways is November 15, 2020.

Please consider sharing your articles, reviews, poetry, art, events, and announcements.

E-mail these to Mel at knightsofmatrix@gmail.com. Please put "Mysterious Ways" in the subject line.

The Intersection of Spirituality and Activism

The War on Us

by Mel Mystery

The War They're Waging...

There's a war being fought against us whether we are aware of it or not, and whether we choose to engage or not. This war is going on in many places in the world, but this article will focus on the war against us in the United States. Many of us thought the war was over when same-sex marriage was legalized in 2015. Many activist organizations shut down feeling their mission was accomplished. Things changed with the 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the U.S. The realization that the war was far from over suddenly became very real. While those waging the war against us are actually a minority in this country, they are a vocal minority with big pockets and current control of the U.S. Presidency and Senate. They're also doing their best to stack the courts in their favor. This minority is made of socially conservative Republicans, Christian Evangelicals, and extremist groups made mainstream by this Presidency.

Their collective goals include making the U.S. a Christian nation; rolling back the hard won rights of LGBTQ folks, women, racial and ethnic minorities; deregulating environmental protections in favor of big business; and enforcing Christian views on marriage, sexuality, and personal freedoms. When they talk about religious freedom, they are talking about the freedom of conservative Christians to discriminate against those they deem unacceptable – such as the rights of cake shop owners to discriminate against LGBTQ customers.

Like a Terminator, these folks will keep on fighting until the bitter end to reach their goals. When one goes down, another will take its place.

Why do we Pagans so often plant our head in the sand when it comes to politics and activism?

One of the biggest justifications I hear for Pagans not getting involved in politics and activism is a concern that making our voices heard borders on evangelism or that by allowing our spiritual beliefs to inform our activism that we are somehow perpetuating our own version of religious wars. I have to call bullsh*t on that (not something I do lightly) for a couple of reasons. We are not asking (or forcing) folks to become Pagan or to follow our deities. Unlike the Crusades, we're not telling people "Join our religion, if you want to live!" Unlike modern Christian Evangelism, we're not telling people, "Join us, if you want an afterlife!" We're not trying to turn the U.S. into a Pagan nation or to impose our beliefs on people's personal lives. As citizens, we have a right to our opinions (whether they are informed secularly or spiritually) and to be included in the discussion—just like everyone else. As Pagans, I wonder if we've become comfortable and complacent in our second-class status in society. We accept that other religious and spiritual groups and leaders (including those who support our causes) can and do speak out, but we don't believe we have a right to add our own voices to the mix.

**IF YOU ARE
NEUTRAL
IN SITUATIONS OF
INJUSTICE
YOU HAVE CHOSEN
THE SIDE OF THE
OPPRESSOR**
-DESMOND TUTU

The other big reason I see for Pagans not getting involved in politics or activism is the idea that those things are somehow beneath us spiritually. Our spiritual beliefs are important, but what happens in the mundane world – not so much. To be spiritually enlightened is to separate ourselves from the reality around us. The thing is most spiritual systems, including ours, advocate for helping others, especially the less fortunate. The spiritually enlightened thing to do is to help the helpless, feed the hungry, or open our door to the weary traveler. If we don't get involved for our own interests, what about getting involved to help others – the immigrant child caged at the border, the Trans friend let go from the military, the animals and nature spirits we claim to honor whose habitats are being destroyed by deregulation? Helping the helpless is a spiritual value.

Our Spiritual Ancestors.

There are stories of witches getting involved in World War II in the fight against Hitler. Long before that, Druids were involved in fighting off invasions of their homelands. No one ever accused the Norse of backing down from a fight. These are just a few examples of

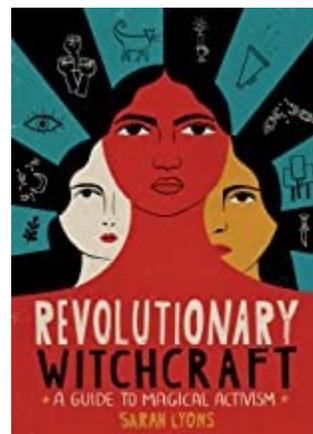
(Continued on page 10)

Book Reviews

Review: Revolutionary Witchcraft

by Mel Mystery

I was an LGBTQ activist long before becoming Pagan, so I was excited when I stumbled across **Revolutionary Witchcraft: A Guide to Magical Activism** by Sarah Lyons while searching Amazon. I've met other Pagans who are also activists at gay Pagan men's gatherings, and some other Pagans who mention environmentalism as among their concerns. However, activism isn't something I hear mentioned much in a Pagan context. My curiosity was peaked, so of course I had to buy and read the book. The tone of the book is very young adult with the occasional casual mention of kinks and fetishes. Lyons paints a broad scope for activism by including LGBTQ activism, women's activism, and environmental activism – among others. She does this within the narrow context of witchcraft, though most of what she says could apply to Pagans of any path, not just Wiccans and Witches.



“A witch’s place is in the struggle.”

The main theme she repeats throughout the book is that “A witch’s place is in the struggle.” She likens witchcraft to politics in that both are using personal and group power and energy to create and influence reality to your will. Politics does this by creating a narrative and getting people to believe and work toward that narrative. Magic does the same thing through spells and rituals. Both politics and magic raise the power of an individual or group to achieve a desired outcome. If we let others control the narrative or if we stay on the sidelines while others work against our best interests, we are giving up our power and our magic. The goal of both activism and magic is to create the world as you think it should be.

“Now is not just the time to take pictures of our altars, but rather to use them.”

Lyons is concerned that witches have all this power and knowledge to shape reality, but most of us are using it for “surface level” stuff like sharing photos of our altars on social media or buying crystals. She states that “It’s long overdue that we fight like we have something precious to lose and the power to win. Now is not just the time to take pictures of our altars, but rather to use them.” Lyons claims our enemies are using magic more effectively than we are. This book was written post-2016 election and she explains how Trump and his base are using their power effectively. Even if they don’t call it magic, it’s still having the same effect. She talks about consensus reality, and how reality is shaped by what people all agree is real and true. Trump and his base have turned consensus reality upside down. Just look at how many times Trump “should” have been evicted from office, or how many Supreme Court justices were pushed through who “shouldn’t” have been appointed. How many times has Trump said or tweeted something that changed reality? Trump’s allies in the Christian Right have their own power. Despite lower numbers, they work their “magic” through their “unshakeable” belief in their religion and their god. Lyons doesn’t believe that our side has the conviction or the focus that the Religious Right and the MAGA crowd have. Our beliefs and actions are more scattered, and just as in a spell or ritual—that dilutes our magick. It doesn’t have to be this way, but we need something bigger to believe in and something unified to focus on.

“A disenchanted world is a disconnected world.”

Lyons also talks about how we live in a Disenchanted World.* “The Disenchanted World is a place of separation – from each other, the land, nature, our bodies, even our stuff, and the people and machines that make all of them. It’s a place where all the magic is gone, and it’s our job as witches to bring it back.” In a Disenchanted World, we are separate from each other, we are cynical, and we feel powerless to change things. This is all by design to benefit those in power and we are separated by all sorts of isms – like racism, sexism, ableism, and so on. Lyons suggests that an us versus them mentality isn’t helpful when we are all fighting the same larger enemies, and that the goal isn’t for us to give up what makes us unique and different either. “Examining the different circum-

(Continued on page 10)

(Revolutionary Witchcraft Continued from page 9)

stances we're all fighting is not about breaking up or dividing marginalized people. Instead, it's about bringing all the various "us" together against a common foe."

Throughout the book, Lyons gives strategies, exercises, and rituals to add to your activist toolkit. Included is a write-up on the AIDS activist group ACT-UP and how they used the stories of the dead in their activism. She includes a "Trans Rite of Ancestor Elevation" to honor Trans ancestors of spirit lost to murder and suicide during the previous year. This rite is meant to lead up to the Transgender Day of Remembrance in November. She also includes stories of the Zapatistas of Mexico and Native Americans at Standing Rock North Dakota.

If you practice magic, whether witchcraft or some other path, and if you care about the people and the world around you, I would definitely recommend this book. It is simplistic at times and might do better to broaden its focus to all magick workers (not just Wiccans and Witches), but overall it's an insightful and thought-provoking read.

**Before I read this book, I had been working up a similar idea about "reenchanted the world" to work into my own practice. The idea I had was to reinfuse the world with random acts of magick.*

(The War Against Us Continued from page 8)

how our spiritual ancestors engaged in battle. These are the folks modern Pagans are trying to emulate. They weren't afraid to get involved. They didn't say these weren't their fights. So why do we not follow their examples?

Even our more recent Pagan and LGBTQ spiritual ancestors took an activist stance. Both movements have been countercultural in their own ways. Paganism often took on environmental concerns, confronted the idea that one has to be part of a mainstream religion to be spiritual, and took on many other issues. LGBTQ folks took on issues of sexuality, gender, discrimination, women's issues, and so much more. To be part of these movements and identities is to see the world from a different perspective from the mainstream and to fight for a world that is inclusive of those overlooked perspectives.

How Do We Fight Back?

Educate ourselves! This helps us to make informed decisions on the issues and to stand up for ourselves and others when the situation calls for it. These informed decisions should also help us when we go out to vote.

Vote! We live in a democracy and we support our goals by electing officials who support our interests. Vote in every election including the local ones. A few years ago, in my own community a fight came up regarding a local historic Lesbian bar. Our side lost, and the historic bar is now gone, but things might have been different if there had been more LGBTQ supportive council members. You never know when these kinds of things will come up.

Be visible! It's easier for our opponents to smear invisible foes. It's different if folks realize we are part of their families, friends, and communities. Being visible also includes bringing our voice to the table. Be visible not just for yourself, but for others, you may not be Trans, an immigrant, or a woman but you can speak up when someone puts them down.

Make allies in the mundane world too! We Pagans spend a lot of time making and working with our allies in the spirit world – deities, animal totems, spirit guides, the Fey, and our ancestors. How much effort do we put into making allies in the mundane world – folks with similar causes, politicians, and like-minded folks in our own communities? Making allies takes time and effort, but we need them in the mundane world too!

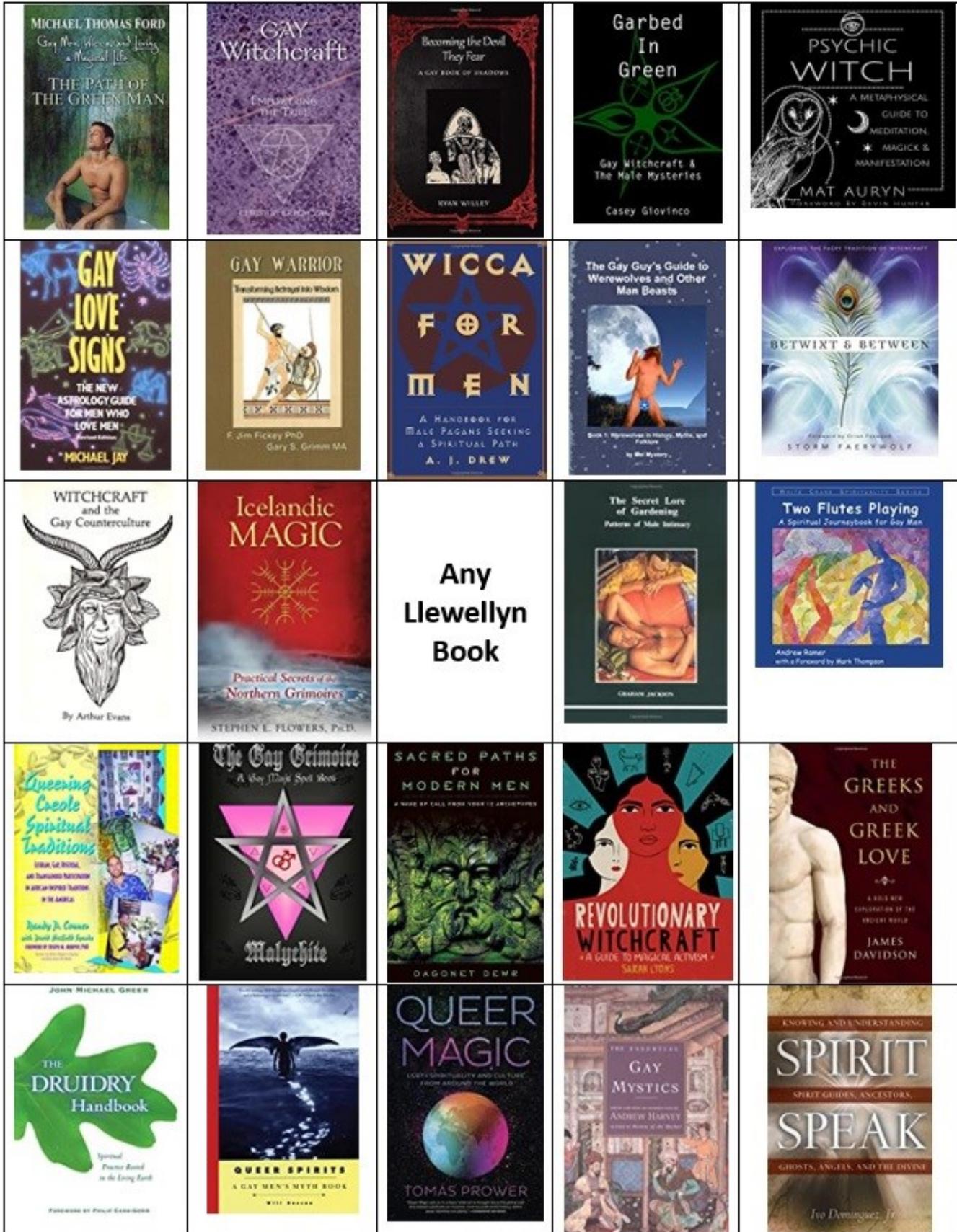
Join in non-violent protests and vigils when appropriate! Sometimes it's important to be visible and to make our voices heard in a big way. This is especially important when the system is working against us and we've tried working within the system to resolve an issue and it hasn't helped. It's also important for sudden events – like shootings and killings, unfavorable legislative or court decisions, and the like.

Help the helpless! Even if politics and activism aren't your thing, you can still do your part to help those affected by the consequences of bad politics. Stand up for someone who can't stand up for themselves. Donate food or money to a charity or cause. Volunteer for a food bank or homeless shelter.

Book Bingo

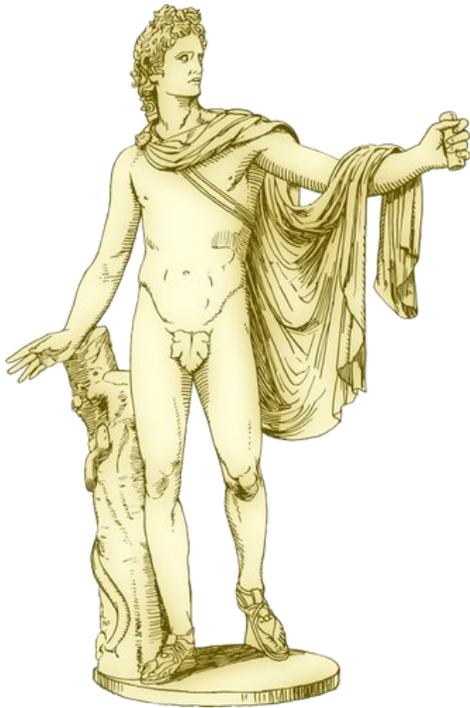
Play this like Bingo. If you get five in a row, give yourself a reward.

Which of these books have you read? Would you be willing to read more books so you can get a Bingo?



Gay Gods and Spirits

Apollo: God of Healing and Plagues



The Greek God, Apollo, is the divine embodiment of a Renaissance man – someone with many talents and areas of knowledge. Apollo is associated with the sun and light; visions and prophecy; the arts; religious and civil law; archery; healing and plagues, and many other things.

Apollo is one of the more popular Greek gods. His mother is Leto and his father is Zeus. He is also the twin brother of the goddess, Artemis. Apollo is most often depicted as a beautiful beardless, athletic youth. Apollo idealizes order, harmony, and reason.

Apollo is an oracular god. At his temple in Delphi, female priestesses known as the Pythia would sit on a three-legged stool, known as a tripod, to divine the future. It is believed that fumes or vapors seeping from below the earth would induce a trance state in the priestesses. The oracles would only give prophecies during the nine warmest months of the year. During the three winter months, Apollo was believed to have left the temple. Above the temple were inscribed the phrases, “know thyself” and “nothing in excess.”

Carrying a lyre, Apollo is a patron of the arts, poets, dance, and muses. Apollo spent much of his time entertaining the gods with his music and song, and he also entered into musical contests, including a contest with Pan on his Pan pipes. Apollo is said to have created the string instrument, but his lyre was originally a gift from Hermes. The two became rivals when Hermes stole Apollo’s herds. Apollo took his complaint to Zeus, and Zeus ordered Hermes to return the cattle. Hermes created a lyre from a tortoise shell and cow intestines. Upon hearing the beautiful music from the lyre, Apollo traded the cattle for the lyre. After that, the two became friends, and they often share altars.

Apollo is a god of medicine and healing, and their opposites disease and plague. Apollo had the power to avert plagues, but also to cause them. His bow symbolized death, terror, and distance. Apollo’s arrows brought disease and death. In the Iliad, Homer tells about the war between the Trojans and the Achaeans. According to the story, Apollo set a plague on the Achaeans because they abducted the daughter of one of his priests.

Patronage of healing and medicine eventually went to Apollo’s son, Asclepius, who was said to be a better healer than Apollo. In some accounts, Asclepius was the son of Apollo and a mortal woman. The Phoenician tradition claims that Asclepius was born from Apollo without the involvement of a woman at all.

Apollo had many male lovers and is the only Greek god who did not sleep with Aphrodite. However, he did sleep with her son, Hymen. Apollo may have had more male lovers than any other Greek god. His male lovers included King Admetus of Thessaly, Amyclas and his son Hyacinthus the king of Sparta, Branchus, Cyparissus, Daphnis, Hylas, Iapetus, Orpheus, Paros, Phobos, Potoneus, Troilus, Tymnius, Zacynthus, and the ram-god Carneus.

Some of Apollo’s symbols include the bow and arrow, the lyre, the tripod, and bay laurel. Animals sacred to Apollo include wolves, dolphins, deer, swans, hawks and crows, and snakes.

Epithets for Apollo include:

Phoebus (“bright”)
Aegletes (“light of the sun”)
Helios (“sun”)
Lyceus (“light” but also “wolf”)
Lycegenes (“born of a wolf”)
Delphinus (“of Delphi” also “dolphin”)
Acestor (“healer”)
Paeon (“physician” or “healer”)
Alexicacus (“warding off evil”)
Latromantis (“prophet”)
Musagetes (“muse” or “leader”)
Argyrotoxis (“with silver bow”)
Hecebolus (“far-shooting”)

Poetry and Art

Chinese Tea and Toast

It's all an illusion, just a dream, he'd expound
To eager seekers of love and truth
On autumn afternoons in red and gold
While serving Chinese tea and toast

He sang of wonders
He'd never seen
The Silver Cord
and Angel's Wings

It's all delusion, a mindless game, he'd state
His unconscious streaming like
A rippling silver brook of meaning
Singing into our ears and minds
While serving Chinese tea and toast

He sang of love
He'd never known
Mother Gaia
and Herne, Her son

We never know when we are loved, he'd sigh
Radiantly seeking
The beatific love of cosmos
The Eternal Brother-Lover
While serving Chinese tea and toast.

— M. Hiers

Cuomosexual—in love with competent, reassuring governance by a leader who uses complete sentences and displays common sense during a pandemic. — Urban Dictionary

Photos of the "The Greek" by Mel Mystery

This and other photo sets are available for purchase at:

<https://gumroad.com/matrixwerx>



Between the Worlds

A Spiritual Gathering for Men Who Love Men

September 21-26, 2020

Pomeroy, OH

www.betweentheworlds.org

Queer Pagan Resources

Queer Pagan Men's Groups

Brotherhood of Arcadia — The Brotherhood of Arcadia (BOA) is a spiritual organization created from the fusion of Hellenist and Pagan beliefs and practices with an emphasis on queer and sexuality positive beliefs, practices, and deities. BOA membership is open to men who love men regardless of whatever personal labels one chooses, and who are also over the age of 18. No one – male, female, or trans – who feels called to join will be turned away.

FMI: <http://www.melmystery.com/index.php/brotherhood-of-arcadia>

Brotherhood of Cernunnos -- A Brotherhood of UK Gay Pagan Men. **FMI:** <http://www.brotherhoodofcernunnos.org/>

Brotherhood of the Phoenix — A Neo-Pagan order for Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender men who love men. We celebrate the Spirit of the Divine within and build community with men who seek positive transformation of self, community, and the world. Together we work to weave the magick that changes lives.

FMI: <https://fellowshipofthephoenix.org/>

Cern'osia -- An eclectic Neo-Pagan faith which focuses exclusively on the veneration and worship of the Celtic Horned God, Cernunnos. Although it could be adapted by anyone who worships the Horned One, it was designed primarily with the needs of a solitary Pagan man in mind. **FMI:** <https://cernosia.webs.com/>

Ecclesia Antinoi — Devoted to the worship of Antinous, the lover of the Roman emperor Hadrian. Antinous was deified after his death and is worshiped by modern practitioners as a god of gay spirituality, youth, and beauty.

FMI: <http://www.antinopolis.org/>

Gay Druid Brotherhood — An international network for homosexual and bisexual men on the Druidic and Keltic inspired Pagan paths. **FMI:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/gaydruidbrotherhood/>

Green Faerie Grove — A brotherhood of queer men in Columbus, Ohio. **FMI:** <http://greenfaeriegrove.org/>

The Minoan Brotherhood — A men's initiatory tradition of the Craft celebrating Life, Men Loving Men, and Magic in a primarily Cretan context, also including some Aegean and Ancient Near Eastern mythology.

FMI: <http://www.minoan-brotherhood.org/>

Radical Faeries — Generally we are gay men who look for a spiritual dimension to our sexuality. Many of us are healers of one kind or another. Our shared values include feminism, respect for the Earth, and individual responsibility rather than hierarchy. Many of us are Pagan (nature-based religion). **FMI:** <http://www.radfae.org/>

The Unnamed Path — The Unnamed Path is a shamanic path for men who love men. The path focuses on four main parts—Magic and Prophecy, Shamanism, Energy Healing, and Deathwalking. **FMI:** www.unnamedpath.com

**Looking for a speaker for your next gathering, retreat, or other event?
Check out the Queer Pagan Speaker Directory online!**

www.melmystery.com/index.php/links/queer-pagan-speaker-directory

Upcoming Retreats and Gatherings

September 21-26, 2020 — Between the Worlds at Wisteria in Pomeroy, OH. A spiritual gathering for men who love men. FMI: <http://www.betweentheworlds.org>

September 24-27, 2020 — Gay Spirit Visions Fall Conference at the Mountain Retreat and Learning Center in Highlands, NC. FMI: <http://gayspiritvisions.org/annual-gatherings/>

October 8-11, 2020 — Arcadia Camp OUT at Arcadia Campground in Buchanan, VA. This year's theme is "The Distance Between Us: Making Connections Across the Void." The Patron deity this year is Hermes. A camping retreat for Queer Pagan and Hellenist Men.

FMI: <http://www.olympuscampgroundresort.com/index.php/events/arcadia>

Blogs and Podcasts for Pagan men who love men

A Path through the Woods — Blog by a gay, Pagan, polytheist who lives in Chicago — <https://www.adrianmoran.com/>

Discovering the Male Mysteries — Official webpage for Mel Mystery and the Discovering the Male Mysteries podcast for gay and bi Pagan men. — <http://www.melmystery.com/>

Enfolding.org — A blog by Phil Hine to discuss interests including Tantra, Queer Theory, Gender, History, and Occult Practice. — <http://enfolding.org/>

Faehaven — Based in Harrisburg, PA the community is forming in order to create a space where queers and their advocates can explore spirituality of all sorts and have a safe space to share among like-minded independent individuals. — <https://faehaven.wordpress.com/about/>

Horns — A NSFW magazine where erotica meets Queer occultism and Paganism. — <http://www.hornsmagazine.com/>

Transfaith — An online journal for Trans spirituality. Includes a Trans Pagan section. — <https://www.transfaith.info/pagan>

Walking the Unnamed Path — Discusses the teachings and techniques given to us by their Ancestors of MWLM, and laid out by their late founder Hyperion. They also discuss topics and ideas pertaining to queer Pagan men in general. — <https://www.blogtalkradio.com/walkingtheunnamedpath>

Witches Betwixt — Witches Betwixt is a collective of queer witches representing a wide variety of magical practices and spiritual paths. We release a 45+ minute episode bi-weekly in which we discuss various topics relevant to the experience of a queer witch. — <http://witchesbetwixt.buzzsprout.com/>

Gay Spirit Visions Fall Conference

September 24-27, 2020
Highlands, NC

<http://gayspiritvisions.org/>

Mysterious Ways

The Mysterious Ways newsletter is produced and published by Mel Mystery.

Mel Mystery is host of the Discovering the Male Mysteries Podcast for Gay and Bi Pagan Men. He is also author of the book, "The Gay Guys Guide to Werewolves and other Man Beasts" and the upcoming book, "The Gay Guys Guide to Druidry."

You can find out about Mel, listen to his podcast, and find out more about his books at: www.melmystery.com

Archive copies of this newsletter will also be kept on the site.

We need your support!!!

This paper is a community-based project. We're not charging for subscriptions. We're not accepting paid advertising. Those writing articles are not paid for their work. This paper is for the Queer Pagan Men's community and by the Queer Pagan Men's community.

If you think this paper is worthwhile, please consider helping us to thrive. We need folks to submit articles, artwork, poetry, reviews, and other content. We need folks to share this in Queer Pagan groups and social media groups. We need folks to print copies and share them in LGBTQ and Pagan spaces in their local communities.

Thank you for doing your part!!!

Next Issue: Queer Vision and Divination

From Tarot to vision quests, what are your favorite ways to seek spiritual guidance and divine the future? Are there any methods that are uniquely "queer"? What other ways do we receive messages from Spirit? Do LGBTQ folks have a special link to the Divine?

Please send articles, reviews, original poetry, and other submissions to Mel at knightsofmatrix@gmail.com by December 15, 2020. Be sure to put "Mysterious Ways Submission" in the subject line.

Submission Guidelines:

1. All submissions should be of interest to Queer Pagan Men and fit at least two of the criteria—Queer, Pagan, and Men.
2. All submissions (especially photography and artwork) should be rated PG-13 or less. Since this newsletter will be shared in social media groups and in Pagan shops where minors might have access, we'd rather err on the side of community standards—not that we necessarily agree with them all.
3. Most articles should be a typewritten page or less. We may consider longer articles based on relevance and content.
4. You retain ownership and/or copyright of any articles or artwork you submit. We are only providing a venue to share your work with the world.
5. We reserve the right to refuse any content for any reason; to make minor edits such as spelling, grammar, and formatting; or to send the content back to you for revision.
6. We will not accept content that is explicitly racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ageist, body shaming, or that otherwise spreads hate, negativity, or misinformation about any population or subculture of people.