

# SPACE-AGE WITCHES

BY TOM HYMAN

Complete with mysterious chants and in-the-nude fertility rites, the sorcerers' society has staged a fantastic comeback, and now number in the thousands in England alone. And, eerie as it may seem, the broomstick brigade even has a few wand wavers in 1966 America.





"Saga"  
(U.S.A.)

March,  
1966.

We're sitting on the floor of a small windowless one-room cottage hidden among the trees in someone's backyard. There are 12 other people in the room with me. They are an odd assortment without much in common. Everyone is chatting warmly. On my right is a housewife, in her early 40's and a bit on the chubby side. Next to her is a grocer, a short, stout man, accompanied by his wife, a cheerful woman pregnant with her fourth child. There is also a university professor, a thin, craggy man with rimless glasses and a nervous habit of stroking his chin. Across the room is another couple, a young student doing post-graduate work in architecture, and his fiancée, a pretty blonde girl of about 20. Next to them are a lawyer and his wife, then an older man, a bank executive. Near the center of the room a young man with a neatly trimmed beard, a psychologist, is engaged in a quiet conversation with another housewife and a librarian in her 30's.

Suddenly the tiny chimes of a small clock perched on a shelf against the back wall begin tolling the 12 strokes of midnight. Conversation stops abruptly. Everyone rises from his comfortable position and busies himself with the preparations. A chalk circle, exactly nine feet in diameter, is carefully drawn on the wooden floor. Then an altar, consisting of an old chest with wrought-iron hinges, is pushed into the center of the chalk circle. A red candle is placed on it, followed by an incense burner, a bowl of salt, a bowl of water, a length of cord, 12 knives, a long steel sword, a wand, and finally, the 12 personal symbols of the participants. Four more candles are then placed just inside the circle at the imaginary corners.

The plump housewife, the High Priestess of the cult, then steps into the center of the chalk circle and slowly removes all her clothing, save for a necklace and a wide metal bracelet. The other 11 follow her example, disrobing completely.

She lights the incense, which gives off a heady, musky odor that fills the room. She then lights the candle on the altar and then with that taper lights the four other candles around the circle. This done, she sprinkles the salt and the water from the two bowls around the floor, to "purify" the circle.

The other 11 people are now admitted inside the circle, one at a time. Each picks up a knife from the altar and, standing nude, faces the east wall of the hut, where some strange cabalistic inscriptions can be seen painted just below the rafters. The High Priestess raises the long sword and delivers a short prayer, or incantation, addressed to "the Mighty Ones of the East."

The High Priestess then states a "problem," to which the group will address its "power." This particular night it involves a man living in California, a relative of one of the members present, who is said to be near death. The group will direct their "power" toward saving his life—driving the illness from his body and making him well.

At this point I am asked to leave the room, since no one outside the cult is allowed to be present during the performance of certain secret rites. When I am readmitted, about 15 minutes later, the 12 participants have joined hands around a circle and begun walking slowly around the altar. As they walk, they begin an eerie chant:

"*Eko Eko Azarak, Eko Eko Zomelak, Eko Eko Ganasas, Eko Eko Arada.*"

Soon they break into a trot, then a run. Faster and faster they whirl around the small cottage floor. Their faces become flushed from excitement and physical exertion. The fat grocer's forehead and chest are matted with perspiration and he is puffing heavily. The group is now approaching the most critical part of the ceremony. They are creating what they call the "power" and concentrating it on the sick man in California.

Once more the running pace is accelerated. Now they break hands and begin to leap in the air, first with short springs, then higher and higher, as high as they can jump. The group falls into disarray and the room becomes a pandemonium of leaping, plunging, nude bodies, crouching and springing, colliding with each other, and occasionally banging into the walls or the altar in the center of the floor.

The grocer suddenly plops his hindquarters down on the floor and sits, gasping for breath. A couple of the others follow him and drop to the floor with a heavy crash. In another minute everyone is lying or sitting about the circle, sweaty and flushed and exhausted.

It's all over. The "power" has been raised, the task has been completed. When everyone has caught his breath, the High Priestess, also the hostess, serves some cakes and wine. The atmosphere of spiritual fervor and mad abandon is replaced by one of chatty conviviality.

By two o'clock in the morning everyone is back into his clothes and on the way home, satisfied with having exercised his supernatural powers and content to resume his normal life until the next meeting of the cult.

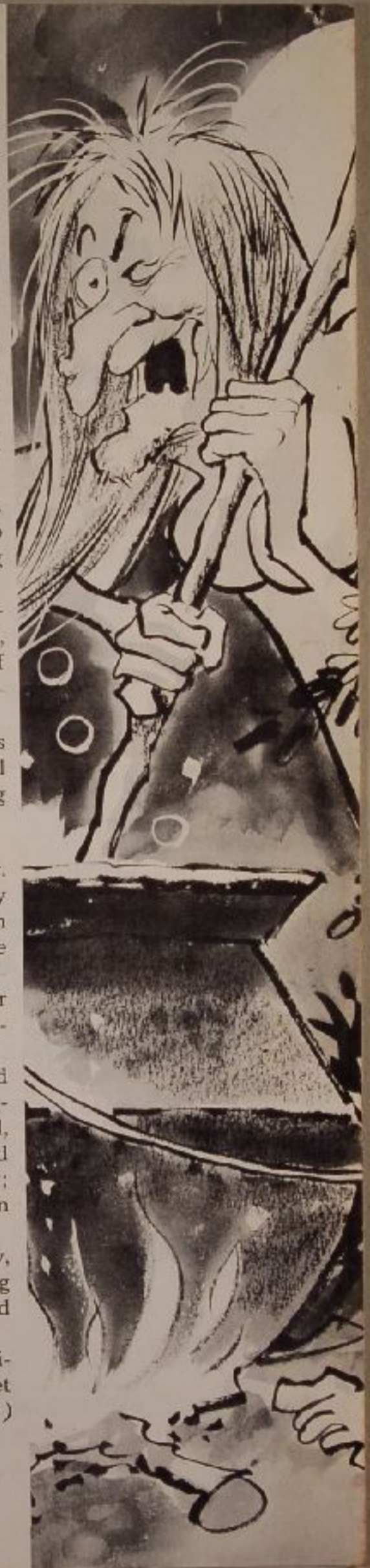
The above scene took place in a London suburb last September. The 12 participants believe themselves to be witches. Although they don't wear black steeple hats and fly around the midnight sky on broomsticks, they do believe they possess supernatural powers. Like the witches of ancient folk legend, they dabble in magic and celebrate Hallowe'en as a sacred religious day. Their beliefs and their secret fertility rites all stem directly from the pagan cult of witchcraft, a religion older than Christendom itself.

Although the cult is springing up throughout western Europe, and even here in the United States, it is at the moment strongest in England. There are at least four groups, or "covens," as they are called, known to exist in London itself, and there are many more spread throughout the rest of the country. They have no central authority; each coven is independent from the others, and each has its own peculiar practices.

The covens meet once each lunar month, usually on a Saturday, to perform rites similar in general if not in detail to the meeting described above. These occasions, called "Esbats," are always held in utmost secrecy.

Four times during the year the witches hold more elaborate festivals, called "Sabbats," which include, among other things, the secret initiation ceremonies for new witches

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## SPACE-AGE WITCHES

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joining the coven. These four sacred days are: Candlemas (January 31), May E'en (April 30), Lammas (July 31), and, of course, Hallowe'en (October 31). Unlike the Esbats, the Sabbats are, whenever possible, held out-of-doors, usually in a clearing in the woods where a bonfire can be lit to dance around.

(The word "witch," by the way, is a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon word "wicca," which means "wise one." Although witches are usually thought of as females, the name is applied to males as well. Male witches are also sometimes called "warlocks.")

These new pagan cults have set a witch's cauldron of scandal bubbling in the daily British press. One of the juicier items is the fact that some of the witches perform their ceremonies in the nude. Since the rites are

admittedly fertility rites, and since they are held in great secrecy, the papers insist that a lot more goes on during those monthly gatherings than just chanting and dancing.

Another controversial subject concerns the witches' belief that they possess magical powers. This is particularly offensive to the Church of England.

Canon Marcus Knight, Canon and Chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral, said: "The Church has always fought against witchcraft. It is dangerous because it is a form of magic, an attempt to influence nature through fertility rites.

"All through the ages these things have gone hand in hand with uninhibited sexual practices. For the sex act is linked with fertility . . . It is a return to the primitive."

That the practice of witchcraft is primitive no one would dispute. Its origins pre-date recorded history. There were sorcerers in ancient Egypt, and witchcraft was practiced by both the Greeks and the Romans. Before the spread of Christianity, some form of witchcraft was the only religion practiced by the various barbarian tribes that settled in Europe and the British Isles.

All through the Middle Ages, witchcraft and Christianity locked horns. The Christian church, through the use of fear, the Inquisition, horrible tortures, hangings, and burnings at the stake, finally succeeded in stamping the pagan cult out of existence. It was only as recently as 1950 that the last witchcraft laws in England were repealed.

Now witchcraft is making a comeback. Whatever the reason for this, the ancient cult of witchcraft is growing. *It is estimated that in England alone there are now between 600 and 6,000 practicing witches, and their number is steadily increasing.*

One of the most prominent of the English witches is Mrs. Ray Bone, who runs a home for the aged in London. A grave-voiced, rather lumpy woman in her early 40's, Mrs. Bone is High Priestess of her own coven, which meets on Saturday nights in a small cottage deep in Lucket Wood, Hertfordshire, a London suburb. The other 11 members (a coven traditionally consists of 12 or 13) include a research student, a civil servant, an electrician, a shopkeeper, a teacher, a solicitor, a local government officer, and two young university graduates. (One of them, a girl in her early 20's,

told me that her parents would be furious if they knew she was involved in this.)

Mrs. Bone immediately strikes you as being so un sinister, so sincere and respectable, that it is difficult to imagine her as a witch. When I talked to her she was busy leafing through real estate brochures in an attempt to find a garage or other building large enough to hold the coven's regular monthly meetings. The problem with their present cottage, she explained, was that it was barely big enough to draw out the prescribed nine-foot circle, and the rafters were so low that several of the witches had bumped their heads on them while leaping about.

Mrs. Bone said that she was a witch because she believed that it was the right path for her. "We worship the life source. Our God (God of fertility) represents to us both life and death. We do not fear him because we believe in reincarnation."

Mrs. Bone's coven has come in for considerable criticism for practicing its rites in the nude. She replied that they worship that way because it represents a dispensing of material things. "It seems obvious to me that people can be just as immoral with their clothes on as with them off."

Speaking with an assured, convincing articulateness, she explained the purpose of their magic rituals. During the dancing and the chanting a "power" is brought down and channeled by the High Priestess to achieve whatever goal the coven has set for itself. "The power," Mrs. Bone said, "is deep inside us—by our rituals we release this energy. In the circle we are not human, we are between two worlds."

The power of witchcraft, she be-

lieves, is latent in all thinking and feeling people. "Feeling is much more important than intellect."

The coven may concentrate on healing, either mental or physical, or solving such things as marital or financial problems. Mrs. Bone believes that they can turn their power to almost any problem and achieve success. She detailed, as proof, the case of a young girl who was seriously ill. At the request of her father the coven convened and invoked the "power." They subsequently found that the girl had taken a turn for the better at the very moment they had concentrated their energies on her.

None of the members of the coven seemed to have very concrete ideas about the afterlife. They all accept the idea of reincarnation, but each seemed to have a different idea as to how it would come about. Few of them had any positive ideas on such standard theological matters as creation or evolution. "We prefer to believe that science can explain all the natural phenomena but that there is some life source not of this world," one of them commented.

Mrs. Bone stressed that, beyond the formalized rituals themselves, witchcraft was very much a personal religion. "There is no moral code as such," she said. "If it harms no one, then do as you wish."

As to the charge that her cult practices black magic, Mrs. Bone stated emphatically that they were pledged to respect life in all its forms. They consider themselves to hold very liberal attitudes on most social problems, and were not interested in harming others through the use of diabolism, or casting evil spells. "The progress of civilization," she said, "killed off a lot of natural things in

people. Only by living a simple enough life can we get back to the old existence. That is what we are striving for."

In order to gain entry into Mrs. Bone's coven, a would-be witch goes to weekly meetings until the members are satisfied that he is sincere, enthusiastic, and personable. They consider themselves a close circle of friends, and they feel that they must maintain this close harmony in order to work effectively. When the initiate has satisfied the coven that he or she is acceptable to them, he must then wait until the next major Sabbat, when the secret initiation ceremonies can be performed. All members of the coven are forbidden to discuss these rites with outsiders.

Another High Priestess I interviewed was Mrs. Lois Pearson, a dark-haired sunburnt housewife in her 30's who lives with her husband, two children, and a three-legged Siamese cat in a semi-detached house in St. Albans. The cat, she informed me, plays a very important role in the ceremonies. When the coven is in a state of trance, the members' souls momentarily leave their bodies, and they are exposed to the danger of losing them. The cat is present at the meetings to guard and protect the souls.

Like Mrs. Bone, Mrs. Pearson struck me as being a quite ordinary person—nothing other-worldly, fanatic, or mysterious about her—and certainly nothing witchlike. Yet, like Mrs. Bone, she is a devout practitioner of the occult magics of witchcraft.

Mrs. Pearson claimed that her methods were more advanced than Mrs. Bone's. Her coven does not work in the nude, for one thing. "We are more developed. We use the powers of the mind," she said.

Some of their rituals were also quite different. Members of Mrs. Pearson's coven fast for three days prior to each meeting. During the rituals, they practice deep-breathing exercises similar to those practiced by the Dervishes. This leads them to a state of trance which lasts from 15 to 30 minutes, during which time "we take ourselves out of our bodies. Our soul or astral body leaves our physical body and travels anywhere in time or place. We are in an intermediate stage between this world and another. It's a spiritual orgasm."

When the coven has been worked up to this frenzied pitch, Mrs. Pearson explained, they give off psychic power, like a generator producing electricity. The High Priestess then halts the ceremony and directs the power to its predetermined object.

Unlike Mrs. Bone, Mrs. Pearson does not believe that everybody can develop the powers of witchcraft. "You can't make people into witches," she said. "It is not a process of learning, but of remembering."

Her theory holds that the total num-



"Yes, I guess you can call it a pleasure trip, Jim. I'm driving her mother back home!"

ber of witches is permanently limited. When one dies he is later reborn into the world by the process of reincarnation. In other words, once a witch, always a witch. Mrs. Pearson's coven makes no attempt to find these true witches. They prefer to let them make their own way to the coven.

When a would-be witch comes around to join up, the coven tests his powers by taking the novice out to a lonely clearing in the woods at night, placing him inside a magic stone circle and leaving him there. Mrs. Pearson claims that she can tell from the accounts he gives or the actions he takes, whether or not he is a true witch. True witches apparently experience what she describes as a "marvelous sensation"—a contact with the supernatural.

Mrs. Pearson's theology is a bit more developed than Mrs. Bone's. In explaining life after death she said: "When we die the soul goes to an astral plane where it is judged. At the moment your soul enters the astral plane it sees your *akashik* record—that is, a flashback over your whole life. You then feel again all the pain you have inflicted on others, but the joys you feel one-hundred-fold. This is your reward and your punishment. The soul then stays in this next world, free to travel and meet the souls of relatives already there. It may remain there anywhere from 500 to 1,000 years. Then it is reborn on earth."

Mrs. Pearson's coven believes in a Supreme Being, a goddess at once Mother Earth and Venus. She is a personal goddess who works directly through the individual.

Healing and helping others, the main purpose of Mrs. Bone's coven, are only the by-products for Mrs. Pearson and her followers. Their ultimate aim is simply the worship of the Goddess and the concomitant mystic experiences and gaining the wisdom that this worship develops.

As for black magic, Mrs. Pearson believes that it exists, but she is convinced that any witch who misuses her powers by delving into black magic or Diabolism would suffer sooner or later.

If some of the witches are practicing black magic secretly (and if they are, they would have every reason to want to keep it a secret) few people seem to worry that this ancient sorcery is actually capable of causing any harm. Evidence of black magic does crop up from time to time. The Museum of Witchcraft in Gloucestershire, England, has many excellent examples of modern black magic,

among them a collection of dolls, effigies of black magic victims—dolls with knives through them, dolls made from the hair and clothes of the intended victim, and so on.

Recently, an incident of black magic occurred in Oxford, the town of the famous university. There had been a great deal of resistance among the townspeople to a bypass that the highway department was cutting through the town. One morning the workmen at the site discovered a black rooster with its throat cut and the knife still sticking in it. Beside the bird they found a black candle stuck in the ground and a note that said: "As to the cockerel, so to the workmen who continue this road."

At last report the road was still going through with no apparent ill-effect to the workmen. Similar incidents crop up often.

As for the witches themselves, one gets the impression that the whole business is more fun and games than serious religion. It's more like belonging to the Elks, the Masons, or the Shriners—lots of secret incantations and ceremonies, a chance to wear a costume, and a place to meet and enjoy friends. Everyone likes to belong to something, and if it can offer a feeling of exclusiveness and a few thrills, then why not? Whether some of these covens are also sex clubs, as many claim, is still unproven.

Whatever witchcraft is today, it was certainly more than fun and games in the past. The alleged crimes of medieval witches—ruining crops, producing abortions in women and impotence in men, causing pestilence among cattle, raising gales to wreck ships, killing by the use of wax images—were sins of the Devil, and the Inquisition, mostly by the use of torture, was able to coerce a surprising number of people into confessing to such crimes.

Here's a 16th century account of a medieval Witches Sabbat, by someone unfortunate enough to have stumbled across one during the night. This account, by Bartolomeo de Spina, written in 1583, is taken from Montague Summers' book, *The History of Witchcraft*:

"A certain peasant, who lived at Clavica Malaguzzi, in the district of Mirandola, having occasion to rise very early one morning and drive to a neighboring village, found himself at three o'clock, before daybreak, crossing a waste tract of considerable extent which lay between him and his destination. In the distance he suddenly caught sight of what seemed to



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# SPECIAL SAGA EDITOR CONTEST ON PAGE 54

March 1966

be numerous fires fitting to and fro, and as he drew nearer he saw that these were none other than large lanterns held by a bevy of persons who were moving here and there in the mazes of a fantastic dance, whilst others, as at a rustic picnic, were seated partaking of dainties and drinking stoups of wine, while a harsh music, like the scream of a cornemuse, droned through the air. Curiously no word was spoken, the company whirled and pirouetted, ate and drank, in strange and significant silence. Perceiving that many, unabashed, were giving themselves up to the wildest debauchery and publicly performing the sexual act with every circumstance of indecency, the horrified onlooker realized that he was witnessing the revels of the Sabbat. Crossing himself fervently and uttering a prayer, he drove as fast as possible from the accursed spot, not, however, before he had recognized some of the company as notorious evil-doers and persons living in the vicinity who were already under grave suspicion of sorcery."

Witches' Sabbats in the past were known to include, along with the chanting, dancing, and incense-burning, such exercises as flagellation, the raising of spirits, cauldron-stirrings, love feasts, and exposure to various dangers, in order to bring the witches to that ecstatic state which enabled them to create their magic power. It is suspected that modern witches perform these same ceremonies during the Sabbats.

As in the past, modern witches jealously guard their secrets. None of the witches I talked with would discuss magic rites, or the details of their curative or "white" magic. It was even more difficult, I found, to obtain information on the subject of

black magic. This was an area that all the witches wished to avoid.

There is no one book for the modern witchcraft cults, but a number of medieval and contemporary books on spell-casting, Diabolism, and other secret magic formulas do exist. The most authoritative and infamous source of black magic is contained in what are called the "Black Books," quarto-sized compilations of evil spells for all occasions, with explicit instructions on how to cast them. After some trouble I was able to gain access to some copies of these books. They make fascinating reading, whether you believe them or not.

Here is a short paraphrased selection of some of the more useful of these ancient and evil recipes.

This first one has probably always been a favorite. It tells how to find out if a girl is still a virgin: Pulverize some lily-pollen, then find some opportunity to get her to swallow it without her knowing it. (Slip it into a drink or some food.) If she is not a virgin, she will be seized with an irresistible urge to urinate.

The books provide many different methods for causing a woman to succumb to your charms. Here's one that's relatively easy. Take a pigeon's liver and a blackbird's brains, dry them out and grind them into a fine powder. Then sprinkle the powder on the girl's food. Result: instant love.

Once you've got her madly in love with you, you'll want to keep her that way. To make sure that she remains faithful, the Black Books recommend that you take a lock of her hair, burn it and sprinkle the ashes on the wooden parts of her bed, after being sure that you have rubbed these spots with honey. She will then be able to dream of no one but you. Repeat this from time to time as required.

For effective contraception, the Black Books recommend that the woman simply drink-the blood of a ram or a rabbit.

Turning to uglier matters, do you want to protect yourself from someone who may be out to harm you? Then write your name on a verbena leaf with the blood of a crow or a white hen. Carry the leaf with you at all times and no one can hurt you.

Another sure-fire protection is to carry a wolf's eye encased in an iron ring. Where you obtain the wolf's eye is your problem.

The books give numerous methods for winning at gambling. Here's one I like: On the first Thursday of the new moon, at the hour of Jupiter, before the sun rises, write these words on a piece of virgin parchment: *Non licet ponare in egarbona quia pretium sanguinis*. Then take the head of a snake, put it in the middle of the writing, fold the four corners of the parchment over the head. Whenever you wish to gamble, attach this affair to your left arm with a red silk ribbon, and no one else but you will win. At the very least, you should draw some interesting comments.

If this all seems like kid stuff, then you might like to try your hand at *evouement*, the art of making someone die by invisible means. Here is one of the principal spells for this black task: Procure a little urine from the person you want to kill. (You're on your own here.) Then buy a hen's egg without haggling over the price and go at night, on a Tuesday or a Saturday, to some field far removed from any human habitation. If there's no moon, carry a lantern. Make a circular incision at the broad end of the egg and extract all the white, leaving the yolk. Then fill the egg up again with the urine, pronouncing the condemned man's name as you do so, and seal the aperture with a piece of wet virgin parchment. With that done, bury the egg in the field and walk away without looking behind you. As soon as the egg begins to rot, your victim will be attacked by jaundice, and nothing will be able to cure him unless you yourself remove the egg from the earth and burn it. If you allow the egg to rot completely, the person on whom you have cast this spell will die within the year.

There's a sampling. There are hundreds more of these centuries-old formulas of black magic. Do they work? There are at least several thousand people alive today who claim they do. Some of these people, like the unknown individual who left a slain black cockerel in the path of the road gang in Oxford, are putting these spells to use. Someone may even be casting one on you. You're welcome to try the same thing. The few we mentioned will get you off to a good start. But, remember, you'll be making a pact with the Devil. ★ THE END



"Suppose we just don't tell anybody about the little car that was parked between us?"