

The Scroll of Set

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[1] Commentary: *The Occult Experience*

- by Michael A. Aquino VI°

As recounted in *Scroll #X-6* (12/1984), Australians Frank Heimans and Nevill Drury have completed their documentary film survey of contemporary occultism, *The Occult Experience*. They have very kindly provided the Temple of Set with a complimentary print of the film, and it will be brought to the Set-VI Conclave in Las Vegas for viewing by Setians in attendance.

From a technical standpoint *The Occult Experience* is an impressive piece of work. The photography is superb; the narration is informative, succinct, and bias-free. The musical selections chosen for the soundtrack are extraordinarily beautiful and atmospheric - to the extent that they significantly boost the visual impact of various ritual segments far beyond their unenhanced performance.

At the same time there is a problem with this film - a problem which has nothing to do with the film-makers themselves, but results rather from the substance of what they filmed.

As discussed in *Scroll #X-6*, my original feeling had been to decline an appearance in the film - not from any distrust of the producers' motives, but rather from concern that the Temple's image would suffer from any visual association with play-occult groups. Since Heimans and Drury stressed that their documentary was seeking the "cutting edge" of modern occultism - the "best and the brightest", as it were - I relented and came out from under my rock.

Magistra Sinclair's and my appearance in the film, however, is limited to an interview sequence. It would not have been difficult to stage a ritual, as other groups and individuals in the documentary did. But such staging, no matter how well-intentioned, inevitably strikes me as a profaning of an action that should **itself** be regarded as a sacred experience.

While watching the film, it is easy to forget the camera-crew's presence in the various episodes, but - again as recounted in *Scroll #X-6* - you certainly can't ignore it during the filming proper. Every one of the other groups portrayed in the film, seemingly so absorbed in the authenticity of what they were doing, must have been put through exhaustive rehearsals, re-plays, and rearrangements for the

benefit of the camera's eye. More than any direct testimony, that tells you something about the seriousness with which they regard what they are representing as rites for communication with the Powers of the Universe.

A second drawback to the portrayal of ritual, even if one grants that some of the groups managed to ignore the film-crew's presence and did in fact concentrate on an uninterrupted, sincere ritual from start to finish, is that ritual magic, by its very nature, is a **subjective experience** rather than a show put on to impress onlookers (as is conventional religious pageantry).

When people are intensely absorbed in what they are doing, it is very easy for them to look peculiar, even ridiculous to an uninvolved audience. And this film is ultimately intended for viewing by that kind of audience, i.e. the un-occult public. After viewing *The Occult Experience* five times and pondering it for a month or two, I think that it indeed makes virtually every individual and group other than the Temple of Set appear adolescent and comic - with only three exceptions (Saunders, Norton, Giger).

I don't say this to gloat, since we are not in competition for the kinds of people who join such groups. But it is educational, since - if this film indeed shows the best that Western occultism can offer - it tends to validate the high opinion we have concerning our own quality.

I hazard a further guess that the other groups & individuals in the film will be deliriously happy to see themselves "in the movies", and that Heimans & Drury did not have to prod any of them out from under rocks to appear, and that - asked to do a ritual - they promptly mocked up the fanciest thing they had in inventory, no matter how solemn & sacred it was purported to be. Such is the hypnotic effect of a movie camera on lonely, insecure, and unhappy human beings: a drink, as it were, of the *Kheft*.

And so to a scan of *The Occult Experience* by episode:

(1) A more-or-less impromptu pagan holiday ring-around-the-rosie dance in the middle of a New York City street by a few Wiccans in various costumes. Some conceal their identities with dimstore costume eye-masks, which look silly. The purpose of the dance is to hail a day which is there anyway, and which would be there whether hailed or not. Cut to -

(2) Interview with M.A.A. and Lilith Sinclair of the Temple of Set. A fairly basic statement of the Setian philosophy. [Frank Heimans did manage to chop out my stuffier statements & retain a few reasonably understandable ones; good for him!] Although Anton LaVey did not respond to H&D's invitation to appear in the film, they got him anyway - through clips from the 1969-vintage film *Satanis*: (a) a brief interview sequence and (b) a couple of the more spectacular rituals (Satanic Mass, Stifling Air,

& python). There was a short detour into the Temple's interest in Germanic occultism, with some stills of Heinrich Himmler, the interior & exterior of the Wewelsburg, and a few marching SA & SS troops. [While this Nazi sub-section could have been portrayed in an extremely negative way, here it was very straightforward and unemotional.] Altogether: An interview sequence which we feel to be a very fair summary of the statements we were endeavoring to make. The camera spends rather more time on close-ups of Lilith than of me; I can't imagine why. Cut to -

(3) Reverend Dean Shilton, Australian Christian churchman, who thinks Satanism is just a terrible, terrible thing. Cut to -

(4) Margaret Adler, author of the coffee-table witchcraft book *Drawing Down the Moon*. She makes several brief interview appearances throughout the film, as she is lively, lucid, and succinct about Wicca and paganism in general. She definitely wakes you up if you are inclined to doze. Cut to -

(5) Selena Fox, head of a Wiccan coven called the "Circle Sanctuary" in Madison, Wisconsin. The scene is a house in the country, from which 4-5 coven members walk out into the snow and hail the four directions of the compass - which are there anyway, and which would be there whether hailed or not. There is a campfire to keep the nature-worshippers from catching a chill. This is one of those episodes which is rescued from total blah by the film's soundtrack, which contributes music so mystical that it could turn a TV commercial into a religious experience. Cut to -

(6) Alex Saunders, vintage British Wiccan and self-proclaimed "king of the witches". Saunders is the only "established occult media personality" interviewed in the film. He is now around 70, and age has given him a dignity that he certainly didn't have when he was first prancing around England playing King-Witch a couple of decades ago [much to the fury of Buckland, Martello, Leek, Huebner, the Frosts, and other would-be kings/queens]. In this sequence Saunders allows that he is furious at thieves who have just stolen his personal computer, and would like to avenge himself on them. "So much," he affably growls, "for magic." He then dons a gold mask & elaborate headdress, lights a couple of flares, and does a slow-motion "Aztec fire dance" with them. Neither the dance nor the costume struck me as authentic, but as a personal magical statement it was solemn and moving, again with superb soundtrack musical assistance. At one point Saunders accidentally sets his loincloth afire. It smolders for about a minute, at which point he becomes aware of it [!] and puts it out. So dignified and graceful is the old gentleman, however, that the

mood of the dance isn't disrupted. [I suppose that ancient Aztec priests occasionally set their jocks on fire too.] Cut to -

(7) Janet & Stewart Farrar, British Wiccans living in Dragheda, Ireland. This is quite evidently one of those female-dominant, male-obedient covens. Here we get to watch the induction of a new Wiccan. His clothes are removed, he is blindfolded, and he is taken outside into the winter forest to wander around as best he can while the high priestess hides behind a tree and calls out his witch-name. He proves that he can walk through the woods and across a stream naked. The blindfold is removed and he makes an un-difficult run between two lines of torches. The terrible ordeal safely over, he can come inside, warm up, thank the high priestess, etc. Cut to -

(8) Rosaleen Norton, an Australian artist of the occult who died in 1979 after years of semi-official harassment and discrimination. She arrogantly proclaimed herself a witch many years ago, when it was not chic to do so, and suffered accordingly. Some examples of her beautiful occult paintings are shown. It was evidently Heimans & Drury's intent to memorialize an otherwise forgotten pioneer of the Black Arts here; good for them! Cut to -

(9) An Australian Wicca coven headed by a couple who are professional fire-eaters in the outside world. They begin by eating some fire, which makes the rest of the episode a bit anticlimactic. An infant is "Wiccaned" (i.e. instead of Christened) and gets a new fireman's helmet to play with while he is frolicking in the magic circle. A lady witch prances around the circle on a broom. We see a "witch wedding" which, we are told, is still not legally legitimate in Australia. The high priest has a neck-pain, so he makes a voodoo doll on the stomach of the reclining high priestess while kneeling between her legs; this, he says, is like magically impregnating her. He massages the neck of the voodoo doll and feels better. The entire coven sits in a circle on the floor for a more elaborate ceremony, which consists, honest to god, of everyone pulling colored ribbons back and forth over the middle of the circle. Cut to -

(10) Good old "Z. Budapest", one-time feminist-Wicca terror of Los Angeles, now mellow and friendly in Berkeley, California. We witness another rig-around-the-rosie dance, this time indoors, totally female, and apparently just for the fun of it rather than any esoteric purpose. "Z" informs the camera that she prefers a mixture of hetero- and homosexuals. "Lesbians bring in affection", she proclaims, "and the straight ladies are totally free, since they are not performing for men." A black member of the coven, who looks suspiciously like a man in drag [a spy?!], is

interviewed. He/she wanted to be a Hollywood actress, but settled for being a feminist-Wiccan instead. Whatever. Cut to -

(11) Gary & Ruth Penhall of the Deliverance Ministry, a Christian Pentecostal group in Sydney, Australia, for whom all occultism is inspired by the Devil. These people show the camera how to exorcise a teen-age girl. She evidently learned how to act possessed by watching *The Exorcist*; all that's missing is the pea soup and the masturbation bit with the crucifix. But the rest of the group also saw *The Exorcist*, so they know how to get rid of nasty, possessing demons, i.e. bore them to death with pious speeches. [In about a minute I was ready to leave myself.] Cut - oh, please, please cut! - to -

12) Baron Patrick Lady Olivia Robertson, heads of the Fellowship of Isis, Clonegal Castle, Ireland. Olivia is a chummy "cookie-lady witch" who insists that the Fellowship of Isis has 5,000 members in 53 countries. [And if you believe that, I've got a bridge I want to talk to you about ...] Pat, who has a lisp you could cut with a wet Kleenex, informs us that some years ago he had a revelation about the great goddess, but that the Fellowship is quite flexible enough to accommodate any kind of goddess, even conventional religions as well. We join a procession into a basement room of the castle, where Pat invites two young ladies to become priestesses by confronting the Dark Earth Mother, i.e. another lady wearing an African mask with big teeth. The D.E.M. takes the mask off, revealing her normal face with one black eye; now, she announces, she is Ishtar. The two priestesses now get to choose their goddesses. One picks Isis (safe bet), and the other picks Selene (pronounced "Seeleeney" by Olivia). Poor Seeleeney. Poor Ithith. Cut to -

(13) Shamans on Java engaged in a dance in which they wear the kind of fake "horses" you used to suspend from your shoulders when you were a kid so that you could look as though you were on horseback. After a few minutes of playing Live Horse, one of the shamans lies down and plays Dead Horse. Another shaman, not to be outdone, sticks several big needles through his face. [At the Magic Castle I learned how to stick big needles through balloons without breaking them, and I think I'll let it go at that, thanks just the same.] Cut to -

(14) Dr. Joan Halifax, anthropologist. I can't remember what she said, which is inexcusable since I've seen the flick five times. I suppose I was playing Dead Horse. Cut to -

(15) Dr. Michael Harner, e-Professor of Anthropology, New School for Social Research, New York. This is the same cat who was romping around in the early San Francisco Church of Satan with Anton LaVey. Now he gets a bunch of people

to sit in a circle on the floor while he shakes a rattle and, to keep things going, shouts "Hey!" every now and then. Harner has written a book called *The Way of the Shaman*, so I guess this is what shamans do when they aren't playing Horse or sticking needles in their cheeks. O.K. Cut to -

(16) Dr. Charles Tart, Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Davis. Tart explains the rattle/Hey! bit by saying that shamans are trying to get beneath rational levels of thought to more primal levels of existence via dance, music, etc. So that's it. I get the feeling that Nevill Drury, who's an expert on shamanism himself, didn't want the film's coverage of the subject left hanging on Harner. Tart was a good finale. Tart is not really your sinister type of occultist. Once in awhile he lives high and writes an article for the Institute of Noetic Studies (IONS) in Sausalito, California, which is part of the "California upper-class metaphysical scene" highlighted by the Stanford Research Institute in the Bay Area and - Cut to -

(17) Esalen in the Monterey/Big Sur area. People pay big bucks to go there so that Stan Grof can have them lie down on pillows, hyperventilate, yell, and throw fits. The Temple of Set is missing something somewhere. Cut to -

(18) H. R Giger, the Swiss artist most famous for creating the space-monster in *Alien*. He lives in a house completely decorated with his fantastic art, of which the camera provides several dramatic examples. Here the soundtrack is once more a superb complement to the visual splendor of Giger's work. An amusing footnote is Giger's chirpy little mother, who bustles around amidst these Lovecraftian Horrors as though they weren't there at all "Once in awhile, when I do something that my mother thinks is a little too extreme," confesses the somber Giger, "she asks me to tone it down a little, so I do." Cut to -

(19) the Temple of the Mother in Australia. High priestess of this outfit is a lady named "Lavada", who says she studied with a teacher in the Egyptian desert. This coven meets in a natural-rock grotto. The group dresses in chitons like ancient Greeks, but when they start chanting "A-neter, Aset!" you grok that they are into the Egyptian scene. Then it's ring-around-the-rosie time once again, this time to the chant of "Isis-Osiris! Isis-Osiris!" led by a priest in a chiton with a Beatle haircut. The high priestess wades into the water. She is followed by a priest with a goatee and Egyptian eye makeup (interesting effect). Then everyone heads into the water and kneels down splash. Listen, if you spend all that time in the desert, you learn to appreciate water when you've got the stuff around. Credits ... End of movie.

As a documentary *per se* by Frank Heimans & Nevill Drury, *The Occult Experience* is a beautiful piece of work - head and shoulders above the pot-boiler kind of "occult expose" we have seen so often. As for the "White magical occult subculture", it's in far worse shape than I had even suspected. Fifteen years ago we used to pick on the Wiccans; now you just pity them.

[2] Alien Visions

- by Mitchell E. Wade I°

For those who will see *The Occult Experience* at the Set-VI Conclave, there will be another attraction besides the segment on the Temple of Set. Nevill Drury and Frank Heimans have treated the viewer to a visit with the Swiss painter H.R. Giger at home in his dark abode and diabolical workshop.

Giger's paintings may be the darkest visions yet to be brought into being. This is no exaggeration, as all who have witnessed his creations will assuredly testify. And while his work can be disconcerting, it is also - particularly for those who follow the Left-Hand Path - of sublime beauty.

I became acquainted with Giger (rhymes with "eager") about six years ago (XIV) upon the release of his portfolio entitled *Giger's Necronomicon*. The book is aptly titled. The plates therein indeed evoke the Old Ones in all their grimly fiendish grandeur. H.R. does retain a touch of humor here and there amidst endless skeletal landscapes, ominous fumes, and hideous, living machines. Most viewers find little to laugh at, though, and in fact find it difficult even to look at his work for very long.

In his book *Inner Visions* Nevill Drury suggests that Giger's art is "Klippothic - the obverse aspect of the integrative energies of the Cabalistic Tree of Life". From my own particular point of view, firmly rooted in the tradition of Yggdrasil, the Norse Tree of Life, his work depicts the realm of Hel, goddess of the underworld. "Hel" is, by the way, the etymological origin of "Hell". This goddess is typically portrayed as having one side or half white and the other side black or blue. This suggests a kind of animated death or life in death. Bradley A. TePaske in his *Rape and Ritual: A Psychological Study* sees in Giger "the underworldly union of Eros (Life) and Death", and states that his Alien, created for the film of that name, is "the personification of a furious depth of life which is indistinguishable from death".

In the invocation appearing in the *Crystal Tablet*, there are the following statements: "Enfold me with the Powers of Darkness; let them become one with me ..." - and - "I am lord of Life, Death, and Life in Death." It is my opinion that Giger provides almost photographic illustrations of the

concepts embodied in these words.

H.R. Giger's stated sources of inspiration include the occult novelist Gustav Meyrink (*The Golem*), that famous and erudite occultist Eliphas Levi, and the Magus Aleister Crowley.

He has described his paintings as "bio-mechanical". They do have a machine-like quality, albeit one animated by the Powers of Darkness - not unlike, perhaps, the beautiful female robot in *Metropolis*. As you will see in *The Occult Experience*, Giger could have been a stand-in for the part of the Black Magician Rotwang. There may be other, more curious resemblances. In the restored version of *Metropolis* presented by Giorgio Moroder, we learn that Rotwang is obsessed with the memory of a dead lover, whose name happens to be Hel ...

[3] Letter

- from Nancy Flowers II°

The last issue of the *Scroll* was certainly a thought-provoking one and stirred up much discussion in my household. Adept Ogle's letter had much information in it and was an interesting attempt by one who admittedly has no academic background in philosophy to define such things as "objective experience", "truth", and so on.

Defining "objective experience" as "information whose direct origin is from the interplay of the central nervous system with objective data" could certainly cause misapprehension of the concepts "subjective" and "objective". This is not to imply that Adept Ogle's logic is faulty, but rather to suggest that he carry it one step further.

I find this whole area an extremely interesting one, and I think that problems in epistemology are of interest to other Initiates as well. I would like to submit that adult experience cannot be described as "objective information" within a matrix of subjective information. In order to stimulate further discussion on this subject, it might be interesting to introduce information from some philosophical and psychological schools of thought where these terms have no validity at all.

Locke, for example, formulated the concept that we can have no knowledge except that which comes from the senses. Berkeley argued that our senses are the sole source of our knowledge of the outside world, and that those senses are easily confused or misled. Thus he held that there can be no contrast between "subjective" sensations and "objective" properties of matter. It follows that, if objects of the senses are subjective, we can have no knowledge of anything beyond ourselves. [For information on how this relates to current theories in physics, refer

to *Mysticism and the New Physics* by Michael Talbot, who relates Berkeley to John Wheeler's Quantum Foam Concept - heady stuff!]

In more modern psychological realms, Carl Jung stated that man can never perceive or comprehend anything fully. [See *Man and His Symbols*.] Man can see, hear, touch, or taste; but how well he **perceives** depends upon how well his senses function.

Current neuro-linguistic schools of thought hold that we are separated from the world outside ourselves. The basis of "perception" - neural transmission - is a bioelectric phenomenon. Any sensory input is transformed into electrochemical impulses transmitted to the central nervous system. We do not perceive reality, but rather a neurological model of reality. And because sensory organs vary greatly from one individual to another, each one of us perceives the world differently.

In light of these concepts, to which I fully subscribe on alternating Tuesdays and Thursdays, the idea of "objective" knowledge of "objective" reality becomes specious. An understanding of the concepts which I have really only outlined above may further magical experience and serve to shut off some of the left brain garbage which can interfere with Workings. Certainly Adept Ogle is not alone in that problem.

[4] **Conclave!**

- by Demon O'Brien II°

Shadows long and gloomy;
'Tis almost the season of the witch:
All Hallows Eve!
Witch means but 1 thing this year -
Conclave!
The deserts, sunsets, sand forever blowing,
Colors blooming across the sky,
Tumbleweeds rolling over the sand,
Blending the shadows evenly.
A cloaked figure rises, hands raised at *Xa*.
Others gather round.
They are the chosen, the few among many.

[5] **Working After-Thoughts**

- by Robert Robinson I°

Deep within the Beast awaits, concealed by fear-filled mysteries. Dormant, yes, but not asleep, the Vigilant One bides æons until the hour of coming forth.

Lurking in the angled corner of my mind, the unknown stirs with the threat-promise of awakening. As the working builds in energy and power, I release myself and am transformed by him who waits.

With silent screams that pass beyond this realm and into dreams, I merge, but have no fear of losing the just-glimpsed self. Yearning to leave the twisted truths that hold me in their chains of guilt, I leap into the abyss to gain the wisdom that terminates the fall.

As I look into the Beast's red-rimmed eyes that have so often been misread by man, I touch with every body pore the glory that is Set, which could be mine if I but dared to pay the price.

The white-god's soul is forfeit, as told in myths of old. But is this a loss to fear and dread when selfhood is the goal? It is my need to grasp the Dark One's hand, and in so doing, partake of the promise so long buried under threat.

Behold the smile of Set whose gift of truth states:

Be only self! Seek only self! Seek possession of the self only, and all other possessions follow. Be alone, and in your aloofness know the love and respect of others who sense the source of your power. Raising the self upon a pedestal of godhood, you have learned the meaning of Set and the secretless secret of great happiness.