

interview by  
Kohinoor Setora

photos by Mark A. Hefty

# Raven Digitalis

*Prince of Shadow Magick*

At an age when most of us were still mastering the fine art of beer-swilling, Raven Digitalis was busy writing books, founding a Pagan tradition, and getting a degree in Anthropology. All that dedication paid off. Today Raven is co-leader of Opus Aima Obscuræ, a “disciplined-eclectic shadow magick tradition” and author of *Goth Craft* (Llewellyn, 2007) and *Shadow Magick Compendium* (Llewellyn, August 2008). As if this weren’t enough, he’s also one of Montana’s leading Goth DJs, and an activist who works to raise awareness of GLBT and animal rights issues.

I recently managed to get Raven to sit down with me recently (he never stops moving!) and tried to figure out what makes him tick...

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**At 23 years old, you’ve just published your first book, *Goth Craft*. How did you get off to such a quick start?**

[Laughs] I guess I always forget how young I am. Spirituality and artistic expression have played such important roles in my life from such a very young age, that I now *live* those things constantly and find myself inspired to create, interpret, learn, and share these lifestyles regularly. Luckily, I enjoy researching and writing, so part of what I perceive as my Will or destiny is a simultaneously fun experience. I also have so many people in my life that help and encourage me along the way.

**And you’ve got a second book on the way too.**

Yep, I wrote two books (the second, *Shadow Magick Compendium*, comes out next autumn) during my college career. Who does that, anyway? My feelings are torn on the issue. On one hand, I’ve got my Leo pride for having written two books while being a student, and on the other hand I feel like I may have short-changed my college experience. I spoke to my dear friend and webmaster Michael the other day and expressed my concern about just that. Michael, who is also an alleged chaos magician and quantum mechanic, said, and I quote, “Come on now. You can exercise your collegiate partying rights at any time in your life!” Too true, too true.

**How did you end up as an Anthropology major?**

When I started college, I began with the goal of opening an occult shop. At the time I thought that a person pursuing such a goal *needed* a similar degree, so I majored in Business. That lasted about twenty minutes; I went to the first Introduction to Business Management class and was absolutely terrified! So, I scratched those plans and changed my major to Journalism. But when I found out how stressful journalism can be, I moved on to English. After that, I tried out an Art major, with hopes of pursuing my photographic artwork but that didn’t feel right either. I settled on Anthropology after realizing that the majority of the classes I had taken just as “interesting classes” were part of the Anthropology curriculum. It turned out that I only needed a handful more classes to meet the degree requirements, so I went with that and haven’t looked back since.

**Some people have college careers: you had a vision quest!**

Perhaps, but I have always been drawn to Cultural Anthropology because of its emphasis on peoples’ ways of life. My studies in Anthropology have propelled my own spiritual experiences, and have definitely helped in my writing and research. Seeing the ways in which others connect to the divine is fascinating and, in my view, totally applicable to modern spiritual practice.

**How so?**

One of the things I find most interesting is that spirituality and reality are so often viewed as entirely separate entities in the West, whereas most other cultures don’t think twice about visiting a shaman or a Priest, leaving offerings to a local deity, performing trances and possessions, or using ethnogens and mind-altering substances. Seeing beyond the scope of the Western world is a spiritual necessity in my eyes.

**What Anthropology books would you recommend to Pagans?**

The most recent Cultural Anthropology book I read was the superbly written *Celebrations of Death* by Peter Metcalf, which looks at death rites and rituals in Southeast Asia — particularly Borneo — as well as in Africa and elsewhere. If I were to recommend a Anthropology primer, it would have to be the anthology *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural* written by Arthur Lehmann, James Myers, and others.



**You didn't just spend your college career reading and writing books, you were running your own coven and starting your own tradition. Even Gerald Gardner didn't do that until he retired!**

My High Priestess Estha and I run a tradition called Opus Aima Obscuræ, which means "Work of the Great Dark Mother." It's a tradition, a system, and a training coven that began in 2003. Despite our trepidation about launching an entire tradition, there was no way that we could avoid the universal obligation. So we put our noses to the grindstone, did the work, made the sacrifices, and formed the tradition. Thus far, it's been quite successful, and the profound number of synchronicities that present themselves constantly confirm the validity of the path. Our tradition is definitely not for everyone.

### **So what is the Work of the Great Dark Mother?**

There is a full description of the tradition on my website but in short, it's a "disciplined eclectic shadow magick tradition." This day and age, it's near impossible to live in society and not practice diverse spirituality. At the same time, we strongly believe that eclecticism shouldn't substitute for spiritual discipline. Each year-and-a-day in our system initiates endure a specific sacrifice, the first one of which is a partial tonsure, or head-shaving. Each "mark" (rather than "degree") holds certain experiential lessons designed to cultivate humility, self-awareness, and empowerment. Everyone has a different way of aligning to Spirit, and OAO is the one we've been directed to create. It's a difficult path, but the benefits are beyond anything I've previously experienced. Estha and I are working on a book that explores the experience of trauma and provides keys for healing deep spiritual issues that can result from such experiences. All of our published material reflects principles we practice in our own tradition. After all, Janet Farrar's advice to budding authors was to just "write about what you know."

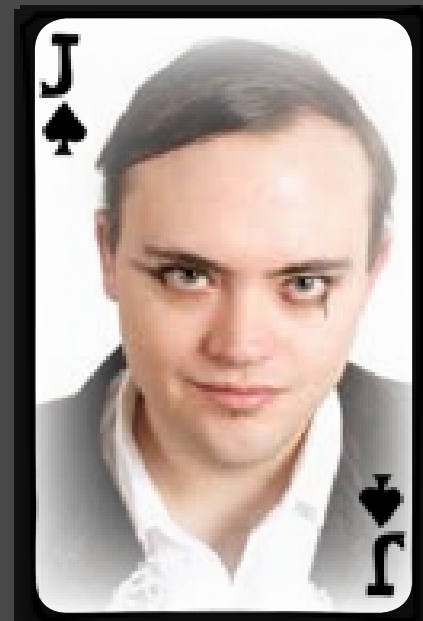
### **You say on your Myspace page that "Goth is not a style. The style/fashion is only an expression of the internal state." Could you tell us a little more?**

Because Goth and its sub genres and related genres are so visual in nature, many people mistake the look for the whole of the culture. But the fashion is only one part of the movement as a whole. Above all I see Goth as a way of viewing the world and the Self. This is why I think it has so many inherent mystical ties. People drawn to dark culture are drawn to introspection and the individual expression of inner darkness through art. Crowley said, and many concur, that magick itself is both an art and a science. Gothiness, if you will, is highly emotional and thus intuitive, and so are Witchcraft and many other magickal spiritual paths. I think that's a huge reason why we see such a correspondence between the Gothic expression and the magickal-spiritual arts.

### **To many people, "Goth" involves a morbid fascination with death. And yet you've gone and written a book which combines Goth and Paganism — a tradition which is more often associated with tie-dyed shirts, crystals and shiny happy things.**

Well, as a Raven, I can't really argue the love of all things shiny! [Laughs.] It's true, the counter-culture has long been associated with Witchcraft! But, this is understandable because the "hippie" movement is all about mental freedom about the possibility that we create their own reality and have a direct connection to nature as a being on this earth.

In *Goth Craft*, I have a whole chapter on death magick. We're so often taught in this culture not to think about death, dying, and other unpleasant things, that when the experience happens — to ourselves or others around us — it comes as a total shock. In my view it's extremely healthy to focus on death energy and the Realm beyond. At the same time, it can be unhealthy to pay too much focus on death and the afterlife, because it has potential to remove one from the Now — which is the most important moment.



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**You’re also a vegetarian and an animal rights activist. How do you relate this work to your Pagan beliefs?**

I think that the way animals are treated for food, clothing, and entertainment is unbelievably cruel. It’s easy for someone uneducated in the reality of factory farming to view animal rights activists as silly over-compassionate extremists, but education could change that. I can’t conceive that any sort of moral or spiritual system could condone the type of abuse animals endure on a constant basis.

I believe that animals are sacred comrades on this earth, and should be respected as our spiritual kin. In factory farming, animals aren’t viewed as sentient beings but as “product.” A vegetarian or vegan diet is one way of lessening this suffering. The average vegetarian actually saves the lives of 100 animals each year.

People frequently argue that our ancestors survived on animal protein since the dawn of time. But our ancestors didn’t factory-farm, they hunted. I have no problem with ethical hunting; populations need to be maintained, and humans have always had the role (as fellow animals) of maintaining animal populations and playing a role in the food chain. One thing I particularly find admirable is that many hunters pray and give respect for an animal after taking its life, and make use of the animal’s body as much as possible. To me that, rather than factory farming, is absolutely Pagan.

**Could you talk a bit about the intersections of queerness and spirituality in your life or in the lives of others? You have a section on this subject in *Goth Craft*.**

I think our culture needs to redefine and broaden our definitions of sex, gender, and sexuality. It’s sad that Western culture is so influenced by Christian ideology that perceptions originating in the Church are seen as natural law rather than sectarian beliefs. Many cultures have recognized homosexuality, bisexuality, and multiple genders beyond “male” and “female” as perfectly natural and inherently spiritual for aeons, but even non-Christians in this culture see such expressions as evil because of the comprehensive influence of Christianity on this culture.

Like Doreen Valiente channeled in *The Charge of the Goddess*, “All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.” This, in my view, transcends limitations of gender. If no one’s getting hurt, and if love and sexuality are approached with maturity and honesty, I see no reason why a person should be bound to modern cultural definitions of sexuality and gender. I hope that we will evolve to the point of being able to be ourselves in this world, without the fear of persecution.

**You live in Montana, a state which isn’t exactly well-known for its Gothic-Pagan-queer-vegetarian scene.**

Well, that’s true! [Laughs.] Luckily, I was born and raised in Missoula, which is the most progressive part of Montana. There are vegetarian restaurants here, and a fair number of animal rights activists, as well as quite a few Goths and Goth-types. In the last year, I’ve been DJing parties with my buddies at Aural Fixation, which are marketed as “Gothic-Industrial-Fetish parties” in town, and they’ve actually drawn upwards of two hundred people!

I’ve also recently realized that many viewpoints, practices, and attitudes here in Missoula are quite Paganesque. A huge number of people hike, camp, and enjoy nature; others have picnics or parties for the Equinoxes and Solstices. It really reminds a person that they’re never “alone,” no matter how singled out they really feel.

## Have you had any noteworthy experiences of the Green Man or Goddess in the wilds of Montana?

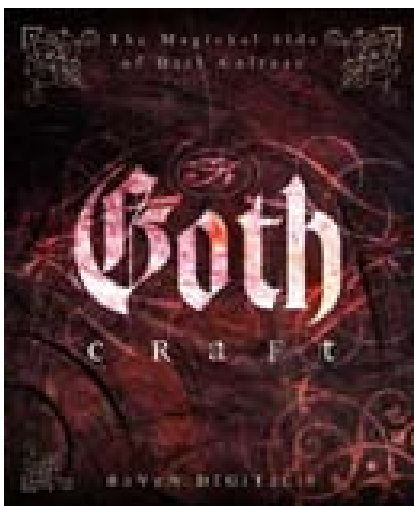
Montana is an amazing environment for getting “back to nature.” That’s one of the perks of living here, and I think it’s a reason for why I was born here. Though may be moving sometime, Missoula will always be my “roots.” The town is healing vortex of sorts; the balance of nature and industry is great here, which allows a person to have one foot in each world.

I especially love taking a five or twenty-minute drive into the mountainous forest or going to a nearby park to perform a ritual with my circle. The God and Goddess of the woods have definitely made their appearances many times. When a person performs earth-based magick in the middle of nature, the gods make themselves known instantly. Elemental summonings come naturally, invocations and godform assumptions are more easily performed, and the spirits of nature immediately align to your own spirit in circle. Even though my Priestess and I have a temple room in our house, many of our rituals take place outdoors. I think it’s essential for Pagans to connect with nature as much as possible, even if it means pushing limits of comfort to do so. Which reminds me, I need to go camping and hiking more often!

## What are your favorite dark-Pagan and Goth occult bands?

Oh my, there’s far too many to name off the top of my head. However, I guess I can suggest that your readers check out the following artists (in no particular order): Inkubus Sukkubus, Faith & the Muse, High Priestess, Butterfly Messiah, Scott Helland & the Traveling Band of Gypsy Nomads, Wendy Rule, Fields of the Nephilim, Unto Ashes, URN, Blood of Angels, Sol Invictus, Psychic TV, Current 93, Onmyou-Za, Mediæval Bæbes, Qntal, Faun, and Enigma. Whew!

## Where are you going from here? What’s on your horizon?



Well, I’m finishing up my second book, *Shadow Magick Compendium*. After that, Estha and I will be writing a book together. I also plan on writing a book with my friend Kala Trobe. Besides the writing world, Estha and I are working out plans to move. I’ve spent all my life in Montana, and wanderlust is kicking in. We’re contemplating Denver or Minneapolis but we’ll see where the Fates take us. !

I also hope to start a metaphysical business called Twigs and Brews. At the moment, Estha and I craft various products like bath salts-and-herbs blends, essential oil blends, soaps, incenses, pendant wraps, and other items, and sell them out of our home. I’m looking forward to the day we can open our doors! ☺

For more information, check out Raven at [www.ravendigitalis.com](http://www.ravendigitalis.com), where you can order signed copies of his book, view his art, find out about his tradition, business, and spiritual services (Tarot readings, spell advice, in-person rituals, etc.) and get more information about animal rights. Raven is also active on MySpace, at [www.myspace.com/oakraven](http://www.myspace.com/oakraven).

Kohinoor Setora resides in New York with her longtime partner and their animal companions. In her spare time she reads Existentialist texts and smokes clove cigarettes.

