

From the Canon of Witchcraft...

Foreword

Introductory Interview

Anton Szandor LaVey

**High Priest and Founder of the Church of Satan,
author of *The Satanic Bible*,
and Icon of 1960s Counter Culture
San Francisco, California
Midnight, July 29, 1971**

Anton Szandor LaVey invoked the United States Constitution on a night sacred to witches, *Walpurgisnacht*, April 30, 1966, when he founded his Church of Satan on the premise that Satanism is an ancient religion protected by the Constitution. On the next morning, May Day, the pagan feast of Beltane, his was a defining act during the cultural revolution of the 1960s. At 36, Anton LaVey was young enough to influence the best of the 60s, and old enough not to fall prey to the worst. He wrote his witchcraft manifesto, *The Satanic Bible*, that became an international bestseller. The media loved his invention of himself. The press named him the “Black Pope” and the “High Priest of the Church of Satan.” He appeared on magazine covers. Director Roman Polanski cast him as the Devil in *Rosemary’s Baby*.

His controversial religion of Satanism was a human-interest lark to the hungry media for three years, until on the night of August 9, 1969, the Charles Manson Family killed Roman Polanski’s pregnant movie-star wife, and several others, and changed everything in American popular culture concerning cult and coven, sex and violence. America demanded serious investigations. On the morning of August 10, 1969, the media anointed Anton LaVey as the point man to explain the dark side of American culture.

Anton LaVey became a lightning rod. He was feared, loved, hated, and respected. He became an icon of popular culture. He was called the “Devil Himself.” Sprung from his intellect, and carried on his shoulders, the Church of Satan entered history, and will be mentioned for centuries to come.

Anton LaVey certainly looks like the archetype of the archfiend: shaved head, goatee, piercing eyes, black clothes. When he invited me to his Victorian, the Black House, at 6114 California Street, San Francisco, he insisted I arrive at midnight as July 28 became Thursday, July 29, 1971. His companion, Diane Hegarty, to whom he dedicated *The Satanic Bible*, welcomed me into their parlor, invited me to have a seat in Rasputin’s sleigh chair, and left me alone while the clock chimed twelve. The black room lined with book shelves resembled a faculty professor’s home, except for the huge tombstone coffee table, the animal heads, the art and scarves and candles piercing the shimmering gloom.

To my left, the front parlor was painted black, with a red ceiling. Black curtains draped

the windows through which I could not hear California Street. Against the west wall stood an altar installed over the fireplace. On its mantle, candles guttered. Shadows flickered on the wall above the altar where hung a huge painted baphomet of the traditional five-pointed star in a circle. Director Roger Corman has said that in a horror movie, a house is always a woman's body. This sanctuary perfectly reflected the centrality of women in the Church of Satan. In fact, Diane later joked that the altar was exactly sized to fit a woman, precisely her.

As the clock chimed fifteen minutes past midnight, a book case opposite the couch on which I was sitting, glided open. Anton LaVey appeared, all in black, wearing a Catholic priest's Roman collar and a red-lined Bela Lugosi cape. He was everything he was supposed to be. He was absolutely charming. He was every inch the assured embodiment of his proverb in *The Satanic Bible*: "Positive thinking and positive action add up to results." Our months of correspondence paid off. We each understood the other. For two and a half hours, we talked. Our time together was purposeful conversation as much as interview, even though, from start to finish, he watched me write notes on my yellow legal pad of every word he said.

At nearly three in the morning, Anton LaVey summoned Diane to join us. For thirty minutes, we three chatted. (It was then that Diane mentioned that the altar was perfect for a five-foot-three blonde woman, which, that being the message, she happened to be.) Anton LaVey asked me if I would like to participate in a ritual. But, of course. He asked Diane to bring out a baphomet amulet.

"I wish," he said, "to present you with this token." The three of us entered the front parlor. Diane stood to the side as a witness. Anton LaVey stood on the altar. I knelt on the altar step. Ritual to a Catholic like me is universally familiar, and universally respected. Anton spoke his invocation, and raised the red-and-black enameled amulet, embossed with the pentagram and a goat face, hanging from a silver chain above my head. Again he made an invocation. I had been blessed by many priests, and he was blessing me again.

"Hail, Satan," he said.

"Hail, Satan," Diane said.

"Hail, Satan," I said.

The earth did not open up and swallow me. The ritual blessing was repeated three times. On the third solemn pass, Anton LaVey, High Priest of the Church of Satan, placed the silver chain over my head. The metal baphomet rested cold for a moment on my forehead. I felt his fingers pull at the chain which was a perfect circle with no clasp. I had never told him that in 1963 the Catholic Church had ordained me as an exorcist. As his fingers struggled to fit the chain over my head, the chain broke and the baphomet fell to the altar step and rolled across the floor.

Anton LaVey and I looked at each other.

It was one of those inquisitive moments when two people's eyes really connect.

In the way that women introduce irony to levitate seriousness, Diane said, "Oh, you're exactly like Anton. You have a big head."

We laughed.

We breathed.

We turned serious.

We hailed Satan one, twice, thrice more.

Then successfully, Anton LaVey, worked the chain down my head and across my face. My eyes studied up close the palms of his hands. He smelled human. Finally, the baphomet rested on my naked chest.