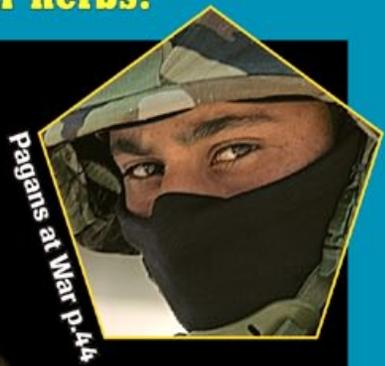


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Witch

CUTTING EDGE PAGANISM



Chris Penczak

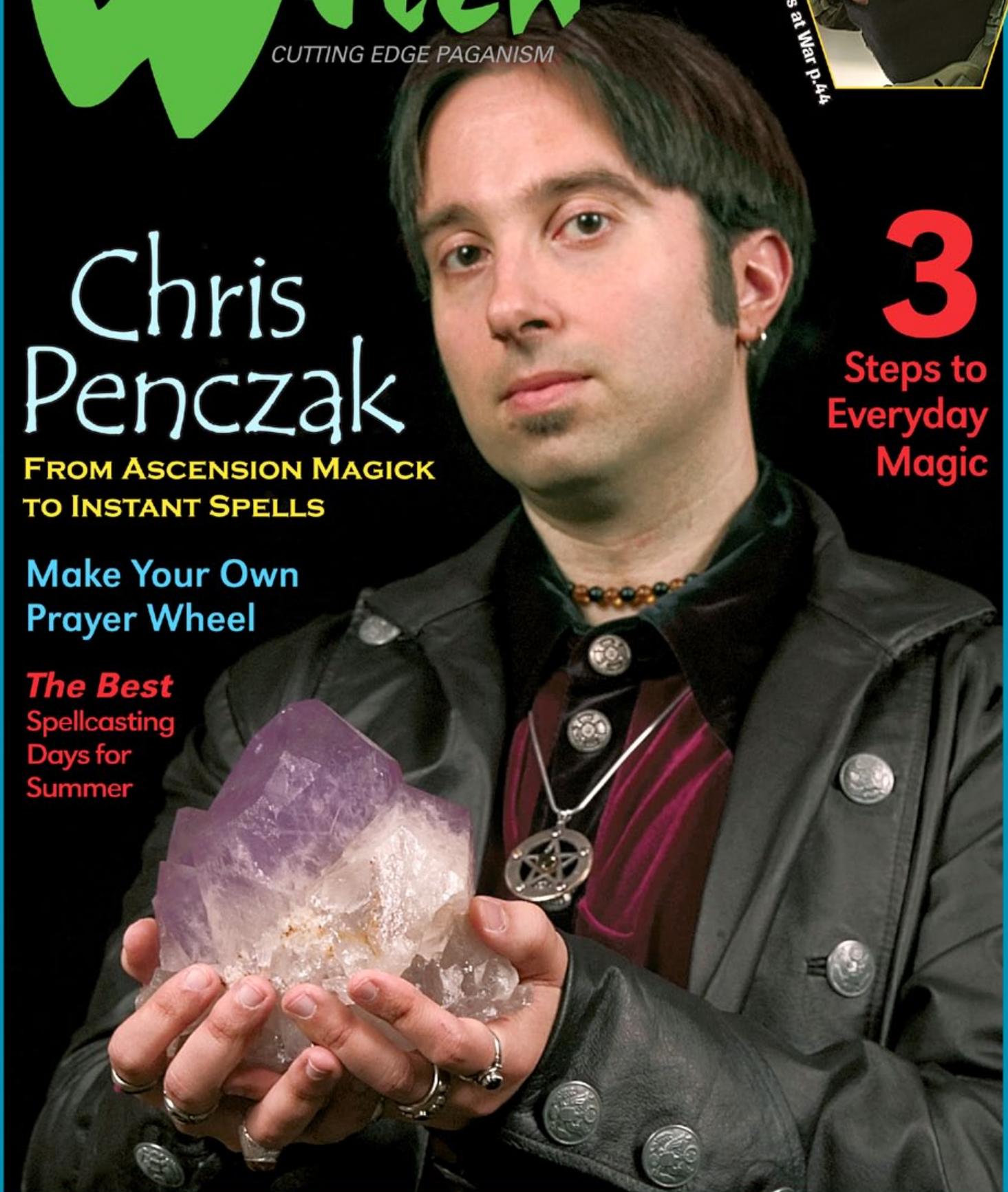
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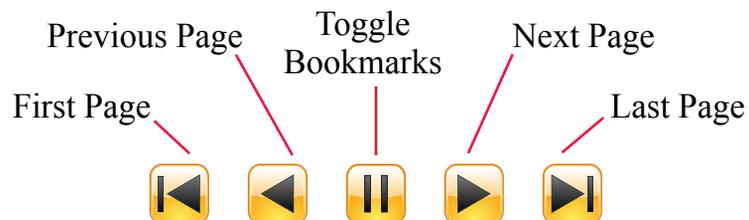


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first things first



Many of modern Paganism's detractors claim we are irrelevant. We stand accused of practicing a religion which draws more from fantasy than history, of spending our time playing at spellcasting rather than facing reality. Do they have a point? Sure, waving crystals around in the moonlight and chanting "harm none" is entertaining, but what does the Craft have to do with the Real World™?

We at *newWitch* say "plenty."

As this issue goes to press, the Iraq War has claimed the lives of over 3,600 American soldiers¹ and between 62,000 and 68,000 Iraqi citizens.² Think-tanks speak of Sunni/Shi'ite conflicts and socioeconomic stressors; protestors blame the Bush administration for sending too few troops to do the job, or, conversely, for sending troops at all. For Specialist Duncan Brennan, a Pagan soldier, the Iraq conflict is a daily reality. In an exclusive interview with Phil Brucato, Brennan shares his thoughts and experiences and makes the Iraq War personal.

Asians have seen their share of evil, injustice and suffering: like many of us, they have turned to religion to offer guidance. In this issue's "Closer Look" Devi Spring introduces us to one of the world's oldest and most respected spiritual traditions, Hinduism. Patricia Ramos proves Rudyard Kipling wrong; her article on making Pagan Prayer Wheels brings East and West together and offers ways in which you can incorporate techniques from Tibetan Buddhism into your personal practice. Devi Spring adds more Eastern wisdom with her article on "The Magic of Mantras." Closer to home Bri, Lance's "Meditating on a Train" offers suggestions on how to join our mundane and spiritual worlds and turn our daily commute into an opportunity for worship.

Witchcraft holds that we are all magicians and thus responsible for bringing the light into the darkness. Christopher Penczak has written nearly a dozen books teaching us the hows, whys, and wherefores of the Craft; in his latest, *Ascension Magick*, he bridges the worlds of Witchcraft and the New Age. Our interview with Chris offers pointers on incorporating magic into our lives and gives us tantalizing tidbits about his upcoming work.

Thousands of years ago the ancient god Dionysus drove the Maenads to madness in the hills of Greece. Danica Davidson tells us about this god of wine and ecstasy, and about the people who worshipped him. Was his cult maniacal or magical? We'll let you, our readers, be the judge.

Meanwhile, our Usual Suspects (I mean columnists) have returned for this issue. Kathy Latzoni shares shopping tips in "Cargo Cult," while Isaac Bonewits comments on spellwork for men, Elizabeth Barrette describes the delights of sensual pleasures, Phil Brucato urges us to go outdoors, Elizabeth Hazel reveals the summer spellcasting forecast, and Galina Krasskova illuminates the worlds of magical herbs.

All this will (we hope) enlighten, entertain, and educate our readers. But our work will not answer the "Why?" which rings through the Virginia mountains after the Blacksburg shootings and the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. For those of us who cannot rely on fanaticism's sharp borders or insanity's stark clarity, answers are hard to come by. That's something else we know as Witches: we have no governing body, no Official Book of Dogma. We don't have The Answer, and we're not even sure that one exists. But that doesn't keep us from asking Questions. Nor does it keep us from holding this world sacred, from honoring our gods with laughter as well as tears. Even amidst darkness, we have not ceased to believe in the light.

Peace,

¹ "Faces of the Fallen: Afghanistan and Iraq Body Count." <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/fallen/> Accessed April 20, 2007.

² "Iraq Body Count." www.iraqbodycount.org/

P.S. We also have some *good* news to report. The Veteran's administration has just conceded that Wiccans are entitled to have pentacles inscribed on U.S. government-issued memorial markers for deceased veterans. See our article on "Pagans at War" for more details. ☺



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