

Atlanta to host witches' convention

On May 11-13, the Sheraton-Biltmore Hotel will be hosting one of Atlanta's most unusual conventions to date. Billed officially as the "First Southern Psychic Seminar," it is in reality a convention for witches.

"We do not agree with what's being publicized as 'witchcraft,'" says Lady Santana of the House of Ravenwood. "If young people think Wicca is the path for them they can come here to get the training and education, and to get the ethics." She emphasizes that the purpose of the May seminar is "to promote consciousness-raising to people, to tell them what Wicca really is." The seminar will feature speakers such as the world-famous witch Sybil Leek, author of over 50 books on witchcraft and related subjects. Another highlight will be performer-parapsychologist "Kumar" (a.k.a. Vernon Craig). His feats of walking on hot coals and lying on a bed of nails (while a dome buggy runs over him, yet) may seem like magicians' gimmicks to many, but they are basically illustrations of the use of mind and energy control to block pain and protect the body from injury.

The House of Ravenwood is unique. It is the only Wiccan sanctuary in the country, and Lady Santana is the founder. Santana emphasizes that Wicca groups "do not get into conversion at



"Kumar" will visit Atlanta in May

all" and in fact carefully screen applicants for suitability. A prospect must study with the group one year plus one day before he or she is eligible for initiation.

True Wicca is very far removed from the "devil worship" publicized by Hollywood and the paperback press. Essentially it is the pre-Christian nature worship religion of Western Europe, often referred to by adherents as the "Old Religion." It runs counter to the Judaic-Christian tradition in that it is pantheistic (involving nature-worship) and matriarchal. (Judaism and Christianity are patriarchal, which probably explains why so many of us in our childhoods perceived God as something on the order of a bad-tempered Marcus Welby.) Wicca is highly individualistic—Lady Santana emphasizes that it's only one of many valid religions—

and imposes on the initiate a commitment to "self-discipline, self-respect and personal responsibility." Wicca's injunction that "you are as you think" has only been recently re-discovered by psychologists, parapsychologists and positive-thinking advocates.

The House of Ravenwood was established three years ago and now boasts 180 members. It seems now to be an accepted part of the Little Five Points community, but Lady Santana recalls that this was not always the case: in the first year a vigilante group of self-styled "Christians" tried to burn the house down. But the hassles and prejudices seem to have subsided now; because, Santana believes, the Wiccans are very family- and