

In the circle of the Goddess

*. . . a morsel
of ancient times,
faraway lands
in urban America*

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ATLANTA — Sintana, head witch of the House of Ravenwood, is holding court in her dining room. Her black robe is trimmed in white satin and a bouquet of perfect red roses adorns the table. Gathered around it are members of the craft, initiates and visitors.

Sintana greets new arrivals with a kiss and the traditional Wiccan salutation, "Blessed be!"

The occasion is a Sabbath, one of eight held yearly at Ravenwood, on holidays such as Halloween and upon the changing of the seasons. Tonight the Wiccans are celebrating the spring equinox.

The first-time visitor may approach the ritual with some apprehension, wondering what is about to take place. He is greeted at the door by a congenial young man in a long black robe and is asked to sign the guest registry. A \$5 donation is requested, then he is ushered into the presence of the Lady.

Sipping on his glass of wine and feeling slightly out of place, the visitor says little. Instead he listens as the witches talk casually of past lives and previous Sabbaths. He notices the hush that falls over the room when Sintana speaks on theological matters. The attitude of her coven toward her is like that of children toward a beloved teacher. For most of the people in this room, she IS a teacher and they are students of the craft.

Much like cocktail party

As the congregation swells to over 30, the dining room grows crowded and people begin to mingle. Except for the robes, it is very much like a cocktail party, full of laughter and small talk.

Though black seems to be the favorite color for the robes, it isn't required and several members have opted for wine or gold. Most of the coven have worn street clothes to Ravenwood and changed into the robes after they arrived. But one couple tell of leaving home in their robes, only to run into a neighbor. "He didn't say a word," they laugh, "but he sure did look."

They wear the robes, one witch confides, solely because of the proximity of their neighbors. They wear nothing underneath and most are barefoot.

The Wiccans speak of their religion with the conviction of "born again" Christians. A lab technician from Spartanburg, S.C., who "came into the craft" eight months ago, is also married to a witch. The manager of a large furniture chain, one of three blacks in the coven, was "seeking" when a co-worker told him about Ravenwood. "This is something I'm doing for myself," he says of his year with the Wiccans.

Sintana claps her hands suddenly and calls for quiet. The circle is ready, she announces, and it is time to form a pro-

(See Witch, p. 2-B)