

Cult of the Dear Lovers

Like many an odd fringe faith before it, the Cult of the Dear Lovers has happily taken root in Southern California. It is, however, a *secret* cult. There are elements to the cult that should worry even the most jaded and cynical adept; and rumors about its priesthood abounds. While everybody knows somebody who knows somebody in the Cult, nobody ever actually admits to being in it.

The theology of the Cult of the Dear Lovers is confusingly bizarre. Cultists reportedly worship the Ocean as the source of all art and music -- whalesong is very close to being sacred music to the Dear Lovers -- who took form once as a charismatic young man, in order to bring the gift of song to the land. Alas: as Ocean touched the dry shore, he rapidly began to age, and ultimately died of old age within the span of a day.

But as he died Ocean sung his final Song, which brought forth from the water others of his magical people (albeit lesser ones). They took his withered body, and brought it back to his home under the waters, to sleep and recover. Then Ocean's people went among men, and lay with them; and from their issue came kings and artists and

beautiful people. These favored bloodlines breed true, through countless generations; and those so blessed are bound to increase the amount of love and art in the world, until it is enough to bring Ocean back to life and youth. And then there will be shouting and reveling, in great joy!

At least, that's what the cult's basic sacred text (*Priomh Ghriod*) say. The whole thing reads like it was a poorly-remembered reconstruction of something from memory; the oldest copy in the Cult of the Dear Lover's possession dates back from 1973 or so. The oldest **cultists** are from that time period; if ever asked, they might remember being told that there had been some sort of setback for the Cult back then, and that so much had been lost at that point and needed to be rebuilt. Not that the cultists would *ever* tell outsiders that. If you're not in the cult, you're nothing to them.

Indeed, the average Dear Lovers cultist is simply not a very nice person. They're invariably extremely attractive and usually superficially charismatic, but their religion encourages cultists to disdain and mock people who don't measure up to the cult's standards. They're also all encouraged to think of themselves as being more intelligent than they actually are, and of course cultists are expected to treat their higher-ups as being reliable

sources of wisdom and information. Couple that with a remarkable amount of hedonism and materialism (it should surprise no-one that the Dear Lovers cult recruits heavily from the entertainment industry), and the resulting stew of general unpleasantness should be utterly unexceptional.

All of which would be also utterly unremarkable, except for the aforementioned rumors. The usual sort, to be sure: debauched and decadent outrages upon helpless victims; hidden self-mutilations and scarification as cultists try to warp themselves into Ocean's image. Hasty burials after orgies go awry. Acolytes lost in a haze of drugs and vengery. The usual, in other words.

But it's also said that the Cult of the Dear Lovers is dedicated to the search for immortality and eternal youth. They seek to transform themselves into 'living gold,' where they will be eternal and beautiful forever; and their rituals *begin* with the atrocities popularized by Elizabeth Bathory and those of her ilk. It is also rumored that the cult has access to *something* that gives them results. Not perfect results, but enough to be worth pursuing further. If they're willing to do what it takes.

If they are, well: over a hundred thousand people go missing in California each year. What's a few more? Especially if they're being used up to help one of the Dear Lovers -- the Beautiful People -- along on his or her journey. That's what they're there for, right?

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