

One Spell to Bind Them All ...

An Interview With Michael M. Hughes

By Ian White

Michael M. Hughes is an author, speaker, and magical thinker. He is also the founder of Binding Trump, a magical and cultural phenomenon that has resonated spectacularly across the world. In fact, Michael and Binding Trump have inspired a Magic Resistance of people who are using their spellcasting and their spirituality to make a positive global change, a community that has only grown larger, stronger, and more determined since the very first ritual was held at midnight, February 24, 2017.

Michael's latest book, *Magic for the Resistance: Rituals and Spells for Change*, is due to be published in September. It was a pleasure to meet him, and I hope you find our conversation as fascinating and enlightening as I did ...

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Q: What's your magical background?

Michael: Magic has always been a part of my life. I've always thought magically, and as a kid I believed that the world worked in magical ways and that you could influence the world in magical ways as well. A lot of people get over that when they grow up, but I never did.

I got my first deck of tarot cards when I was 11 years old — they were the James Bond 007 tarot cards that were created for the movie *Live and Let Die*, and I still have the deck! Also, it was the 1970s, and the whole culture was just soaking in magic and the supernatural, so it was a really huge part of my childhood.

My father was a very strict Catholic, but he took up transcendental meditation and was always picking up books on ghosts and UFOs, anything that fell under the umbrella of the paranormal. And I would grab those books and read them. We used to watch *In Search Of ...* with Leonard Nimoy, and one day a friend he worked with got hold of a 16mm copy of *Chariots of the Gods* and screened it at his house. I never thought any of it was strange or weird; it was just a part of my life growing up.

Q: How did you begin practicing magic?

Michael: I've always felt there's something especially magic about the practice of tarot, and as a kid I also did this weird sort of sigilization ... long before I even knew what a sigil was or how to use it magically, I would make a symbol for something I wanted and try to send energy into stuff.

When I was in my 20s, I started a Scott Cunningham Wicca-lite kind of magic, and then — as the Internet came into being, mostly via Usenet, bulletin

boards, and dial-up — I discovered Chaos Magic and felt like I instinctively understood it because I'd been doing something similar as a kid, making these pseudo sigils or whatever they were. And then I discovered the Golden Dawn.

I think it's a normal progression for a lot of people who get into magic — start with a little light witchcraft and then maybe use some chaos magic, sigil techniques, stuff like that, and then be like "What the hell, I'm going to go head first into the Golden Dawn!" So that's what I



Michael M. Hughes

did, and I was a pretty heavy ceremonial magician for a number of years.

But then I had a Eureka moment where I was really trying to understand the correspondences of the tarot and the tree of life and why the trump cards were on the different paths, and I realized all the myths that were part of the Golden Dawn system, how much things had changed since it was originally developed. When the system began, they were using history as they knew it, but as time's passed, we've realized that the tarot didn't originate in Kabbalah, it originated in 15th century Christian Europe. Yes, it's fascinating that there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and 22 Major Arcana cards, but that doesn't mean they're necessarily connected.

So then I started to wonder how much of the rest of the system was valid, and it really opened my eyes. I thought what I needed to do was go back to the very beginnings of magic — how it started, how it changed through time, what were the practices that were used in antiquity, and which of those practices are still used now. And then I thought, why don't I also look at shamanic magic, and Eastern magic, instead of just being stuck in this Western magic rut.

It was a real wake-up call for me, and it started me on a path that's been incredibly rewarding. And for the past dozen or so years, I've been engaged in a deeply immersive study of cross-cultural magic, pulling together elements to try and create my own system based upon history, based upon things that exist cross-culturally, but also putting them to the test and seeing what works.

Q: So what's your definition of magic? What do you believe is at the heart of all magic?

Michael: I look at magic very, very broadly, and I think there's always an element of consciousness involved in it — alteration of consciousness or change in consciousness — but I also see magic working in things as diverse as art, music, and literature.

I also write fiction, and the process of writing fiction and feeling something coming through me that doesn't necessarily feel controlled, the idea of the muses or daimons or something like that, feels like a very magical process to me in the same way that when you read a book, you're looking at black squiggles on paper but yet it's changing your consciousness, it's creating this shared dream between you and the author that is always absolute-

ly unique with every reader even though we're all looking at the same words on the page. That shared experience of being immersed in a story is very magical to me in the same way that really powerful art is also magic — religious art, like walking into a cathedral ... there's magic in the way that space is structured.

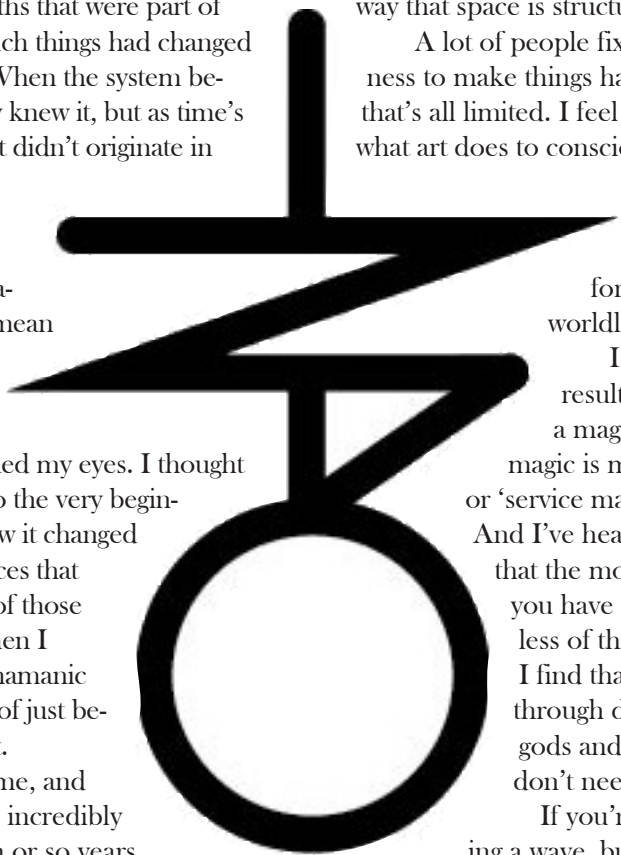
A lot of people fixate on magic as using consciousness to make things happen in the world, but I think that's all limited. I feel there's a lot of overlap between what art does to consciousness and the creation of magical consciousness. So, for me, theurgical magic is part of my practice, just practicing magic for spiritual purposes and not for worldly desires or things like that.

I find great value in practical results-driven magic, but I call myself a magical thinker. I like to believe that magic is much more than just 'results magic' or 'service magic'; it's about living a magical life. And I've heard other magicians say this too, that the more you practice magic, the less you have to practice magic. Now I do far less of the results magic than I used to, and I find that just by aligning myself spiritually through devotional acts, interactions with gods and spirits, and things like that, I also don't need to do as much practical stuff.

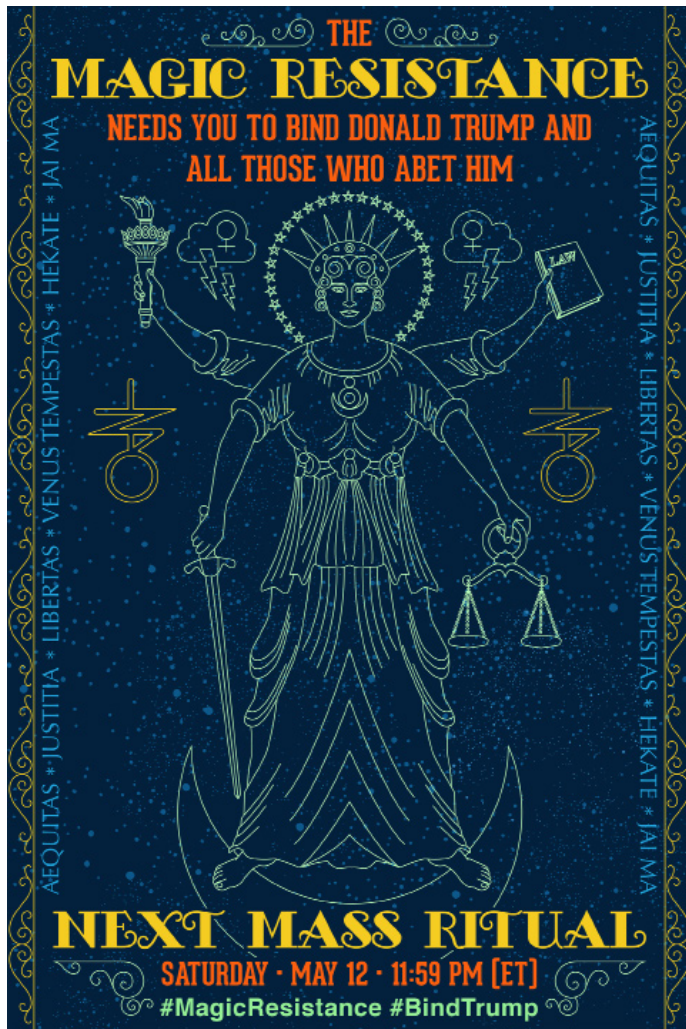
If you're attuned, it's very much like riding a wave, but the key is to know how to ride that particular wave so you're in the right place at the right time and the magic happens. I find that just by living a magical life and attuning yourself to the currents around you, the currents in your society and the currents in your personal life, that's the real trick. It's not having to do little rituals to make certain things happen, but to create your own magical existence, which then puts you in the right place at the right time to have things happen.

Q: Let's talk about Binding Trump. When you posted the first version of the binding spell on the Internet, you mentioned that it was created by yourself in collaboration with members of other Orders. Since then there have been several versions of the spell. Do you have a preferred one?

Michael: I think my favorite version is probably 2.2, but I was being a little cheeky when I wrote that original post because I was testing the water. In the origin story, I said I'd worked on it with lots of other people, but I honestly said that for artistic effect, because in almost any theoso-



The Binding Trump sigil.



Thousands of witches have cast binding spells against Donald Trump since he first took office. The primary goal of the #MagicResistance and #BindTrump movement is to keep Trump from harming the world. (Artwork by Karina Ruiz Diaz @Kitty_Lemiew)

phy or magical tradition, there are always hidden masters or superior avatars from another dimension!

I was also not sure of the reception I was going to get. I realized there would be some sort of blowback from fundamentalists and crazy Trump supporters, so I was kind of couching it a little bit in case the blowback was really harsh, and then I could say just say, “Well, I’m only a person putting this out there!”

The fact is that I wrote the ritual myself and then sent it to a few people in the magical community asking for feedback, suggestions for tweaking words, and that kind of thing. But then I started thinking this is something I’ve worked very hard on, and I’ve got to own this.

Q: Are you surprised by the way the ritual has taken off?

Michael: ‘Surprised’ would be an understatement! It happened so quickly that when it went viral, I was shocked – within a week of publishing the spell, I was being inundated with phone calls and emails from reporters.

When I published the spell, I thought a few dozen people might enjoy it, but the fact it’s blown up as big as it has is overwhelming. By the time I did the first ritual, it was all over the national news, we live-streamed it on Facebook, and all kinds of news organizations wanted to film it, but I didn’t feel comfortable doing that.

But one funny thing that happened – I got so tired of news producers saying they wanted to film people doing the ritual and asking me where people were going to be doing it that I said, “I hear a bunch of people are going to be outside Trump Tower doing the ritual at midnight, so why don’t you just take your cameras and show up; ask if you can film them?” But in truth, I didn’t know if that was actually taking place or not!

Well, after we finished the first ritual that night, my friend showed me his phone and said, “Take a look at this!” Sure enough, a bunch of witches had gathered outside Trump Tower in New York and also in Chicago, performing the ritual on the sidewalk! That’s the extent of how big this thing got. I barely got any sleep. I was on the phone all day with different reporters. It was surreal.

Q: Can you locate the moment when it really exploded into the public consciousness?

Michael: All along it’s really had its own energy, but a huge moment was when the musician Lana Del Rey tweeted about the spell with an image of herself looking witchy, saying something like the ingredients were available online. That created a major torrent of publicity and opened it up to people who might not otherwise have seen it on the news.

And then I also remember going into a store to buy wine for the ritual and when the woman ringing up the register asked if I wanted my receipt, I said, “Yeah, I need my receipt. I’m hexing Donald Trump tonight!” Without missing a beat she replied, “Me and my friends are doing that later; do you have the unflattering photo?”

That was the point when I thought life cannot get more strange than this. Here’s a spell I put together and published online and now people all around the world are doing it, people who have never done magic or rituals of any kind are saying, “What the hell, I might as well give it a try!” It was a genuine *Twilight Zone* experience.

Q: What prompted you to create the spell?

Michael: The reason I came up with the spell is because after Donald trump’s election, it really felt like

reality had kind of broken, that his presidency and so many other horrible things were happening so quickly that all the norms had just suddenly been discarded. The word I kept coming back to was surreal. So I thought anything I could come up with to oppose this man and the people surrounding him had to be equally surreal. It couldn't just be a normal march or letter writing; it had to be something more.

And then I remembered the Yippies and how they tried to levitate the pentagon in the '60s because back then their reality was also broken, people were dying in Vietnam, and their world felt warped. I thought that's the kind of activism that we need; it has to be serious, but it has to be as equally bizarre as the times are. It has to be surreal. And that was really the incentive to do a spell.

I thought, what's more surreal than getting a whole bunch of people together to cast a spell on the president?

That was the genesis, a response to the feeling that all of reality had just collapsed.

Q: Even in the U.K., where I live, when Trump won the election, it felt like the ground fell away beneath us.

Michael: And it's just kept accelerating; it hasn't stopped. Thanks to the 24/7 news cycle, there's always something happening; it's like a firehose of horror. That's actually what it felt like, being sprayed in the face by this unending stream of bad news. It still feels that way to a large extent, although the tide does seem to be turning. But where magic's concerned, you can't really quantify how it works — when you get the results you want, you say it was successful! That's just how magic is.

When Donald Trump is gone, we are going to take

'Strange Magic's' Syd Moore Weighs in on Binding Trump Phenomenon

I asked author Syd Moore, who I interviewed in the December 2017 issue of *Paranormal Underground* magazine, and whose latest novel *Strange Fascination* has just been published, what her perspective is on the Binding Trump phenomenon. Here's what she had to say ...

Syd: I think the Binding Trump spell is really interesting because it strikes me as being very much an echo of the magical effort that was in play during the Second World War. All across the U.K., housewives and crafters were quite frequently involved in magical acts and spells that attempted to foil the Third Reich's efforts.

In fact in March 1941, the *Reader's Digest* suggested that readers knit their own Hitler dolls and then stick pins in them whilst reciting this:

*Istan, Come and help us
We are driving nails and needles
We are driving pins and needles
Into Adolph Hitler's heart
We are driving nails and needles
We are driving pins and needles
Cats will claw his heart in darkness
Dogs will bite it in the night.*



The binding spell, I think, is very similar, although certainly less aggressive! In fact it's much more benevolent. Trump is seen as being bound so he won't do harm, to himself or anyone else. Who knows whether it's working? Certainly in the Second World War Hitler did hear

about some of the magical activity that was happening in England, and we know that it did worry him, because he was interested in the occult and had a belief in magic.

So, these rituals and spells did work to a certain extent, even if it was only psychological. I'm not sure if the binding spell is working on Trump, however. Possibly this is because, certainly on a public level, he doesn't seem to have any spiritual or magickal sensitivities.

But at the same time it has great power in terms of a symbolism — it's a positive act raising energy against what is perceived as a force of negativity. I can see how it would empower some people.

Plus I'm all for people acting together with focus — it is how change is affected.

Follow Syd Moore on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/Syd-Moore1>. ♦

the full credit for driving him out of there! I say that with a tiny bit of cheekiness, but the people who are doing this spell have become such a focused engaged community, so supportive, and every time we do this ritual, more people come onboard with it. And out of this particular spell other spells have grown. The community that's coalesced around it is really humbling to me; it still blows my mind.

Of course, I take some credit for writing the spell and publishing it when I did, but it really feels like this marriage of activism and magic and spirituality was already taking form and the spell just allowed those elements to come together in a larger way. It's all about currents. I think a lot of magic is knowing the right time to do the right things, and this has absolutely been the most right-time/right-thing experience I've ever had.

These people were ready for the spell; they were feeling the need to merge their spiritual practices and their magical practices with ritual to do something positive and resist the dangerous surreality that's happening.

Q: And it's not just about Trump is it? It's right across the world, in seemingly every part of the world it's caught the imagination of so many people. Is part of the reason it's entered the zeitgeist is because people are so tired of everything that's going wrong right now and want to feel empowered to do something about it?

Michael: From really early on, what a lot of people told me is that the ritual helps them to stay focused on the important things in their lives, the things they have to stand up for and fight against and resist. After each ritual, people post pictures of their altars on the Binding Trump Facebook group and talk about their experiences. It's amazing the energy they feel.

And so many people have said — and I can attest to feeling the same thing — that once they do the ritual it's like a liberation; it takes away the anxiety. Maybe a skeptic or hardcore materialist would say you're only making yourself feel better by doing the ritual, but I'd reply, well what's wrong with that? Because even if all this ritual did was help people feel better, feel a break, feel like they're taking their power back from this relentless firehose of

horror — the norms of government being dismantled, environmental regulations being wiped away, white supremacists gloating about 'their' president ... if all the ritual did was help people feel like they're taking back some of their power, I'd still be happy.



"This book provides spells, rituals, and fascinating historical examples designed to help you put your magical will to work to make the world a better place today."

And your question has hit on something else. You're watching all this from the U.K., but over there you're looking at Brexit. People in Europe are watching the rise of authoritarian governments and fascists and nationalists ... it's like a global mind virus, an ideology virus eating away at people, and it's not just in the U.S. Yes, it came to a head with this particularly awful individual, but he's just the locus of something much bigger, something that's embedded in human belief and human consciousness, and many of us who are opposing it — either magically or in more mundane ways — feel that we're really at an important point — we're at the edge of an abyss that's really a do-or-die moment for basic democratic principles and institutions, not to mention the environment.

We don't have a lot of time to fix these things, and I think that's what motivates so many of us. Many people see what's happening as a spiritual crisis. It's not just the old battles between

communism and capitalism and things like that; this is about our spiritual identity and the principles we hold dear and believe in. It's a spiritual battle.

And the fundamentalists see it that way too; you know, the ones that believe President Trump is God's chosen prophet and all this insane crap. They think of it as a spiritual battle too, and in some sense they're correct. I just believe they're on the side of the darker end of the spiritual spectrum.

I practice magic, but I grew up Catholic. I still think the teachings of Jesus are some of the most beautiful moral teachings, and when you go back to Jesus' teachings, not necessarily what the priests and bishops and popes decided — the dogma that accreted onto Jesus's teachings — but his actual teachings of peace and love and forgiveness, I still consider them guideposts to how I live. And, of course, there's lots of similarities in other traditions too.

So it's really sickening to me to see people who call themselves Christians embracing the absolute antithesis of



Aidy Kathleen & Karen Tibbits-Williams

Share Binding Trump Rituals

Through the course of researching the interview with Michael M. Hughes, I've been fortunate enough to talk with several members of the Binding Trump community (who have all been, as Michael says, fantastic people to meet).

Here's Aidy Kathleen's thoughts, as well as her experience of the binding that took place on the night I interviewed Michael ...

Aidy Kathleen: I do the original ritual, which Michael crafted every month. I make vision boards for every single one and make sure I call in the highest good of all so that I know my intentions are aligned with the evolutionary impulse of the omniscient being who lives through all of us. I get quite creative with it. I want them to be relatable.

There is so much injustice in the world, it is easy to fall into despair, so this is my way of kindling my own light and sending it out towards people who are feeling hopeless in the situation they are in.

Donald Trump is a con man, and his rhetoric is not only idiotic, it is dangerous, divisive, and asinine. He is making a mockery out of what should be a position held by someone with the utmost integrity, wisdom, and compassion. That's why I, unlike other witches, have no problem hexing his administration.

I called that night's binding the calm before the storm ... the night of it, there was this incredibly eerie energy, a massive storm was brewing, and the next day we had this HUGE ice and snow storm like you would usually see in January.

I got extremely sick, but I'm hoping that it is cleansing me somehow and I will soon be in better shape than ever. But, yes, the energy was intense. It felt like mother nature responded to our intention.



Aidy Kathleen

Karen Tibbits-Williams lives in New Zealand, and she told me how she synchronizes the ritual and why it's important to her to take part in it ...

Karen Tibbits-Williams: Even though New Zealand is ahead of the USA in terms of time zones, I coordinate the timing of my own ritual to coincide perfectly with everyone else. So, this does mean I'm effectively starting the ritual a day ahead, owing to the date line ... but, in reality, I'm performing it in synch with everyone else.

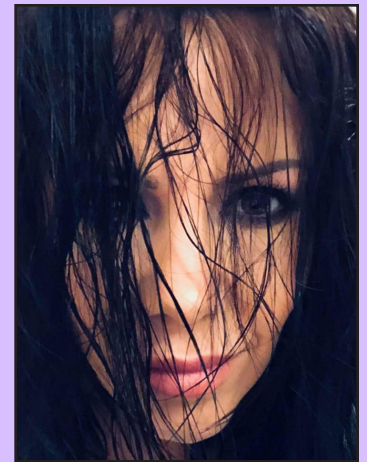
I'll admit that the afternoon isn't my preferred time for ritual. I would ordinarily wait until nightfall. However, there's a certain beauty and elegance in knowing the energies I raise in my binding are combining with those of others around the world, and especially in the U.S.

I am certainly aware of feeling connected with everyone else as it happens. It feels a little like being a part of a giant web that is woven around the globe ... a strong and powerful web of energy that entangles Trump and binds him from doing harm.

For me, it was painfully clear before and during the election process that Trump wasn't a fit candidate for presidency. His enormous ego, complete disregard for science (and for the truth in general), and utter lack of common decency spoke loudly to me, and I — and many of my friends — watched horrified as the election results came in.

And it became increasingly clear that the world was about to suffer an appalling, Trump-shaped catastrophe.

I came on board with the binding ritual as soon as I heard about it, feeling strongly that something should be done ... and by any and all means necessary. ♦



Karen Tibbits-Williams

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everything that Jesus spoke about. Everything He promoted, they're doing the exact opposite of it in His name. It's this toxic form of fundamentalist Christianity that was birthed around the Reagan era when Christianity became known as a particular right-wing brand of fundamentalist Christianity that merged itself with politics — that was really a crucial turning point, and I don't think we've ever recovered from it.

There are lots of amazing Christians out there doing beautiful work, helping other people, living a Christian life and really engaging with the principles that Jesus taught, but that's not where Christianity is in the United States nowadays. Nowadays it's a toxic anti-Christian perversion of Jesus' teachings, so it's funny that those people attack us as if we're doing something that's horrible and hellish and damnable when they're supporting a man who Jesus would be revolted by if He ever met him.

And do you remember when they laid hands on Trump before the election? The one thing I recall about that is they were all wearing these big gaudy rings ... what about poverty, what about the idea that ostentatious wealth contradicts everything that Jesus taught? It's so obvious to any right-thinking person that what passes for Christianity in the U.S. is in large part a foul perversion of Christ's teachings.

Q: You're not a witch, but the ritual has been embraced by a huge number of people in the witch community. However, certain Wiccans have also criticized the spell because of the three-fold law. They say what you're doing is dangerous.

Michael: Yes, I found that interesting, and I didn't expect as much of a backlash from the pagan and witch communities as I got. First of all, I didn't think it would be so popular that people would even know about it to criticize it (!), but as it began to spread, I did anticipate the fundamentalist Christian backlash, that the conservative Christian types would think what we're doing is diabolical.

I even put a verse about demons of the infernal realms in the ritual just to freak those people out because I'm of the belief that demons — and I use the platonic definition of demons — are in fact spiritual entities that are not necessarily good or bad. But even if I would want to summon demons (which I don't), it's not easy; you can't just say, "Hey demon, show up!" So I put that line in there to freak out the evangelicals. But the criticism from the pagan and witch community was a little surprising.

You mention the three-fold law? Initially, that was where most of the criticism came from, and my response to that was, first of all, I'm not a Wiccan so the three-fold law doesn't apply to me. And, second of all, this three-fold law doesn't go back to the Neolithic era or even the Middle Ages; it's something that Gerald Gardner came up with in the 1940s or 1950s when he was writing — I think — *High Magic's Aid*. So, the three-fold law isn't some kind of magic truism. And I'm not a witch; it doesn't affect me.

But I also tried to explain that a binding spell, as I view it, isn't a hex or a curse where you're wishing ill-will on someone. All you're doing is trying to restrain them from doing harmful things. Historically, magic has always been used for all sorts of purposes. If I could slap a lawsuit on Donald Trump, or write the White House a letter,

or get enough people together to get him to stop doing something — why shouldn't I use a spell to accomplish the same thing? If you're doing something to the best of your ability to defend the people and things that you care about, or stop something that you perceive as harmful, I don't see anything malign in that. And the way I see the Trump binding spell is that we're attempting to stop him from doing damage. He's already doing damage. Let's try to minimize it; let's try to prevent the more egregious harmful things that are happening.

I think people get weirded out by magic because they don't understand how it works, and it feels like you're meddling with the nature of the Universe, but you do that in other ways every day. So the way I look at any kind of magic that might be seen as malefic or negative is, would I use other means to do the same thing if I could? And if I could, I'm fine with doing magic to stop it. That's just my personal belief and understanding based on my experience, and it's fine if others disagree with that.

The other thing is, there was a lot of backlash from people in the magical community — and I won't name names — who were negative about everything: "Oh it'll never work ... it's not the right kind of magic ... you're supposed to do magic in secret," and on and on. Who wrote this rule book? Where are those rules written in stone? It's OK if this is your personal belief or your traditional belief, but I don't share those beliefs, and if you want to say this spell is not successful or it's not going to work, just look at the number of people doing it every month. Look how it's growing; look how it's spread. That is magic.

It caught the public consciousness; it changed consciousness; it started a Movement. People were waiting for something like this, and even though Trump's still in office, it's created this community of people who have married their mundane activism with a more spiritual form of magical activism. You can't deny it's already been successful.

Q: To me, it feels like a natural modern evolution of the ancient cones of power... it creates a positive unified intention that may take time to work, but no one can dispute that on some level it's having an effect.

Michael: I agree. Even if Gardner made the cone of power story up, which some people believe, but I kind of take him at his word that it happened as he wrote it, it still created a powerful myth. There's a similar story about Captain Drake who apparently used sea witches to keep the Spanish Armada from invading. And when I

was researching my book, I found out about people using poppets to try to hex Queen Elizabeth I.

One of my favorite stories happened in the 1940s — a group of people in the state of Maryland had started hexing Hitler, and they invited the author William Seabrook, who had just written a book about witchcraft, to help them do it better. Seabrook joined them, and they went to a cabin, dressed a mannequin up in Nazi uniform, and painted a Hitler moustache on it, did all this Voodoo magic, drank lots of rum, and drove nails into the mannequin before chopping off its head and burying it.

When I was researching that story, I discovered an old *New Yorker* article about it, where they interviewed William Seabrook and he said the most important thing about the ritual is that more people do it, that

"I think people get weirded out by magic because they don't understand how it works."

groups of people do it, and that the news gets back to Hitler and he finds out we're doing this. Seabrook wanted people to hold Hitler hexing parties! And that completely mirrors the Trump spell, which I think is a fascinating parallel.

If there had been social media in the 1940s, maybe Hitler hexing would have gone viral, because that was ultimately Seabrook's goal. So I thought the similarities between then and now were uncanny.

Q: And now the Magic Resistance has evolved out of Binding Trump?

Michael: The term 'Magic Resistance' was another cheeky thing I came up with because I used to play a lot of Dungeons & Dragons when I was a kid, and you could use magic resistance to defend yourself against all forms of magic. I thought what a great term — Magic Resistance! — and it completely caught on.

And it's come to describe a whole variety of actions and spells that people are doing. Culturally, the Magic Resistance was already in the wings waiting to happen, and the binding spell just allowed it to have a name and come out in the public consciousness. But so many people have told me the term catalyzed the way they were feeling.

Q: There is so much darkness happening across the world at the moment. I sometimes wonder if a negative tulpa has been created and it's the people who are binding Trump and forming the Magic Resistance who are all that's holding it back?

Michael: That's an interesting take on it. I think people who are spiritually attuned, who are socially conscious and understand history, can see really disturbing parallels to other dark times in history in the same way that the rise

of Nazism also felt like a really palpable tulpa or cloud of darkness that was way beyond the norm. To me, it's fascinating that the side which is pushing against growth and evolution and compassion are the side that's calling themselves Christians and the people who are actually embracing compassion, decency, love, and justice are witches. What a wild wonderful world we're living in!

When I step back and take a larger view of it, I'm still shocked at the strange dynamic of it all. And if you talk to people who are doing this spell, they really do feel like the light bearers, the ones who are pushing for the evolutionary side of consciousness and the social aspects of our species, expanding our circle of compassion versus tightening and crushing that compassion and looking for scapegoats and people to hurt and blame. So it's the witches who are carrying the torch for the things that I consider Christian principles. It's truly fascinating.



**"It's the witches who are carrying the torch for the things that I consider Christian principles. It's truly fascinating." —Michael M. Hughes
(Photo by @Ghost_Lisa via Twitter)**

Q: Are we on the cusp of a global understanding of magical thinking?

Michael: I'd like to believe that and, to a large extent, I do. I feel like materialism is hitting its death throes in a lot of ways, the way people are leaving organized religion but still seeking some sort of spiritual satisfaction and connection in their lives.

Have you heard of the scientist Dean Radin? He's just written a new book called *Real Magic* — it's a scientific approach to magic — and he's saying that when we test magic with science, which we have done in the field of parapsychology, magic is real. And this is from a guy

who's a physicist and runs the Institute of Noetic Sciences. So I really feel that we're seeing the death throes of the reductionist materialistic idea that there is nothing beyond our meat sacks.

And I really think there's a resurgence of interest in magic; I see it all the time — the fact that I'm writing this book, that this Trump spell caught on ... there's so much evidence to me that there's a real thirst for not just being a spiritual person, but for using spirituality in a practical manner, thinking magically and thinking, *No, we are bigger than what science tells us, but we're also bigger than what the Pope or our Church tells us.* I think the idea that life needs to be re-enchanted is a very powerful thing for a lot of people.

Q: Let's talk about your upcoming book, *Magic for the Resistance: Rituals and Spells for Change*. Is it still due to be released in September?

Michael: Yes, September's still the launch date! It's being published by Llewellyn, and they've been a really fantastic publisher to work with. Before I was published by Random House, but I'm a small fish in the Random House universe — with Llewellyn they saw the potential of this book and bumped it ahead of everything else, because they realized that this is a time-sensitive piece and it needs to come out before the general election.

I had to write the entire book in a month, which is truly the most grueling thing I've ever done. Some writers call a deadline their 'book jail.' I called this my book death march

because that's what it felt like! I was working with so little sleep and with so much research to do, but I'm very pleased with how it's turned out.

The book really lays out magical guidelines to assist with all sorts of issues — for the MeToo movement, there's a spell in the book for people who have been sexually abused, as a way to bind their abuser from hurting them anymore. There's a Black Lives Matter spell. There's a spell for healing of the Earth. There are spells to give your candidate a boost in the election. And that's only naming a few.

My aim was to write a very practical book in the hope that when people read it, and read through all the spells,

they'll see the framework of how I do magic. It's like a teaching tool, as well as a practical help. At least, that's what I hope it will be.

Q: Did you find out anything new about your own practices while writing the book?

Michael: I don't think I reshaped any of my own ideas, but I was shocked by the parallels in history and realizing that this is really nothing new. People have been resisting authority with magic since ancient times, and all I did was hook into a current that goes back to antiquity but is surfacing in a different population in a different way. If anything, writing the book reaffirmed my understanding of magic.

I was into ceremonial stuff for a long time, heavy cabalistic magic, but over time I tried to shave away the 'esoteric cruft' and go for the real simple practices. Now my magic is very folk-magicky in a lot of ways; there's no waiting until the proper planetary hour or using the Sephirot or anything like that. It's very simple intention, very simple tools — candles, images, words, incense — and it's embedded in folk magic traditions more so than Ceremonial or Wiccan, but yet it shares a lot with many other different traditions too.

But I'd just like to say that the creativity of people who are doing the ritual is incredible. After each binding, after I ground myself and get back to a normal head space, I go online and look at the pictures of people's altars, and the beauty of them is just astounding. Some are very simple, and some are really ornate, but most of them are extraordinary. The creativity of this group, of the people who are doing this ritual, is humbling and mind-blowing all at the same time.

I've also been online in lots of different communities over the years, and the warmth and supportiveness of the community is like something I've never seen. I've never been part of a group that has so little friction, that is so concerted in their efforts and so supportive and helpful when other people ask questions. I've also got great moderators, who are conscientious and vigilant and fantastic in what they do. It's been a really beautiful experience.

Q: You've also published horror fiction. Are you working on anything at the moment?

Michael: I do have something, but I've had to put it aside for this new book, so I'm not sure when I'll get back to it. It's going to be a very gritty urban noir with elements of magic in it. I jokingly call it 'Harry Potter meets The Wire!' I also may have another magic book after this one, but it will be more of a beginner's guide to magic with the working title *The Art of Magical Living*.

The binding spell has really crossed over with a lot of people who are magic-curious but have never done



any kind of magic before, so this book will show them that magic isn't scary. It will almost be a self-help book that demonstrates how you can make your life better with practical magic. So I'm keeping my fingers crossed that might be happening too.

Q: Finally, I've got to ask about *The Blackwater Lights* trilogy... those are fabulous works of imagination, but they're obviously grounded in at least some kind of reality. Did you have an experience that inspired you to write them?

Michael: Yes, actually I did! I had a very, very strange UFO sighting experience in 1990, and after thinking about that over the years, what it could have been, that it was also tied to dreams and felt like something much deeper than just spaceships flying around ... it really just bubbled and festered inside my head and coalesced with other fixations I had, like a deep interest in conspiracy theories and conspiracy realities, things like the U.S. government project MK Ultra. And it unspooled in ways that I wasn't expecting, and the book's changed as my understanding of magic changed.

There are also a lot of Easter eggs in there for occultists or people who study the darker aspects of U.S. intelligence agency malfeasance and occultism, so it was really a lot of fun, a whole grab-bag of stuff that fascinates me. The story just happened, and I went with it!

For more information about Michael M. Hughes, visit <https://www.michaelmhughes.com/> and <https://twitter.com/michaelmhughes>. The official Bind Trump Facebook page is at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/OfficialBindTrump/>. ♦