

# Sneer Wars

**T**HE PROBLEM with fighting the global corporate capitalist system and all it represents is that the struggle inevitably brings you into contact with some extremely unpleasant people. I'm not so much thinking of the police, who actually vary quite a bit — from sadistic killing machines to anguished and conflicted human beings. I'm thinking of people in positions of power: judges, prosecutors, and most of all, media.

Just a little contact with any of the above and it becomes clear that you are listening over and over again to the same voice coming out of many mouths, as if they were all possessed by the same entity. I call it "The Sneer." The Sneer also controls a lot of the academic establishment as well as many critics of the arts, literature, film, and other creative fields. The Sneer also likes to pick on some aspect of our physical appearance. And of course, the Sneer is one of the voices of racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and all the other prejudices. If you want to hear it, just go back and listen to some old Rush Limbaugh tapes — or pick up any newspaper.

The Sneer's function is to defend those who hold power, by attacking the self-esteem and social value of the less powerful, by getting the oppressed to align with the powerholders and join in the attacks, and by undermining hope, passion, courage, creativity, and new ideas that might challenge the status quo. The Sneer's appeal is that it makes the Sneerer feel superior. Open your hearts and your voice to the Sneer, and you can ally with those on the top against those on the bottom, with the known and the sure against the unsure,

with the strong against the weak, and with the winners against the losers.

Witches know the Sneer well — after they stop accusing us of eating babies, the Sneer is the first line of defense against taking us seriously as a religious and spiritual tradition on a par with any other.

The Sneer has a favored vocabulary: "stupid," "mindless," "losers," "woo-woo,"

"drivel," "fat," "ugly," — I'm sure you can think of others. But the Sneer is most easily recognizable by tone, and by certain facial expressions such as the Smirk.

The insidious thing about the Sneer is that when it's directed against us, we often subconsciously accept its judgments. To guard against that, we need wards, magical protectors.

A ward can be a physical object, charm, talisman, or an energetic form. I recommend simply installing an Alert Light somewhere on the edge of your

aura, like that Oil Alert light on the dashboard of your car, that blinks when the Sneer is detected.

When the Sneer is directed at you, ask yourself, "Whose power, authority, advantage, or status am I threatening?"

One powerful way to counter the Sneer is simply to ignore it, and go on doing what you're doing. Again, Witches are experts at this. The growth of the Pagan movement over the last 30 years is a tribute to our collective ability to ignore the Sneer.

Never, ever engage the Sneer on its own terms. Don't get defensive, don't feel obligated to explain or apologize. If

you feel absolutely compelled to respond, you might point out that the Sneer is evidence of moral and intellectual bankruptcy. The Sneer shrivels in the face of pride

and confidence.

A good shield helps — perhaps a thin coating of teflon when you're faced with a serious Sneer attack, or that favorite childhood counterspell: "I'm rubber, you're glue, everything you say bounces off me and sticks to you."

FOR THOSE times when shielding is not enough, we sometimes need to get heavy with the hexes — but carefully, remembering that what we send out returns three times over. It's not difficult, however, to craft an anti-Sneer spell. Here's a few you can embellish by

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burning or burying appropriate objects while chanting the following:

For agents of the criminal (in)justice system: "May those who are pledged to uphold justice be held to that pledge, and truly serve justice, or may their works and aspirations come to naught."

For the media: "May \_\_\_\_\_'s career and fortune advance in exact proportion to his/her compassion, care for the poor, and willingness to see, hear, speak for, and fight for the truth."

For academia: "May opportunities open for \_\_\_\_\_ in precise relationship to the openness of her/his mind."

I'm sure you can think of others. But beware! If we're going to use these spells, we need to watch out for blowback in the anti-Sneer wars.

That means we need to also set our Sneer Alert to let us know when we

ourselves become channels for the Sneer, to notice when we direct the Sneer against each other, when we invoke it in our arguments, our gossip, our emails. When we hear the Sneer in our own voices, we need to ask ourselves a few dangerous questions:

"What power, authority, or status am I defending?"

"Why am I allying myself with the strong against the weak?"

"Why am I refusing to engage seriously with these ideas, or critiquing them with respect?"

NONE OF US are entirely Sneer free: the voice is so pervasive in our culture that we can't help but have moments when it takes us over. But we can't afford to indulge it if we want to challenge the structures of power and domination that surround us. In community, we might help each other by quietly murmuring

"Sneer Alert!" when we detect its presence. The Sneer is toxic: it will poison our relationships, our friendships, our loves, and our common struggles if we let it. But it's not actually very strong when it meets with exposure or resistance. Like many molds, it shrivels under strong light.

And always remember that it's no fun to go through life sneering at vision and cynical about every passion. Far better to be sneered at, and live a life of courage, imagination, and hope.

*STARHAWK'S TRAVEL schedule appears on page 51, or visit [www.starhawk.org](http://www.starhawk.org) Starhawk is the author of many books on Goddess religion, from "The Spiral Dance" to "Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Tradition." She is a feminist, activist, teacher, Witch, gardener, drummer, and one of Reclaiming's founders.*

## untitled

by Keri

We must stand, and hold our ground,  
Against the growing violence,  
We must speak and make a sound  
Against the growing silence,  
The lines in the sand are being drawn  
And the countdown has begun  
Will we take the burden on  
Or will we walk away  
Will we choose the way of life  
Or wait until too late  
The stuff of life is fading fast  
Right before our eyes  
The water, air, and soil are poisoned  
What little that's pure won't last  
The politicians posture  
They meet and they debate  
Then they choose their special interest

And say it's for the state  
They say that our economy  
Won't survive the change  
They bury new technology  
And deny the scientist claims  
When the people try to speak  
Raise voices to be heard  
They are met with riot police  
Tear gas, rubber bullets, or worse  
So much for a democracy  
A Republic strong and true  
We've let go our autonomy  
A circumstance we now rue  
The fiction we learned as children  
Of what our government would be  
Of how it was to serve and protect  
Runs head long into reality  
I fear for the next generations  
Unless we can stem the tide  
Respecting all our relations

And learning what the earth can abide  
The time is come to put away destructive things  
Take responsibility — Step into the fight  
Determine to laugh to dance and sing  
And not give in to their might  
We must learn and teach and grow  
Imagine, invent, become  
Steadily nurture the seed we sow  
Till a new way of life is won  
I know it will not be easy  
Already Great Lady the cost  
Those imprisoned and tortured and vilified  
Discounted, ignored and "lost"  
All that we seek and hope to gain  
Hangs in the balance by a thread  
We are fast approaching the crossroads  
And must choose which way to tread  
So I ask myself these Questions  
As I read the signs along the Way  
Am I ready to speak and make a stand?  
How can I turn and walk away?