

Blue Moon Religious Ritual May Have Motivated Triple Murder

A Florida woman and her two adult sons were killed in their Pensacola home in what investigators believe was a ritualistic murder linked to last week's "blue moon," police said on Tuesday.

The victims, identified as Voncile Smith, 77, John William Smith, 49, and Richard Thomas Smith, 47, were found dead on Friday, three days after police believe someone the family knew entered the home and killed them as part of a witchcraft ritual.

"The elements of this case are odd, at best," Escambia County Sheriff David Morgan told a news conference.

"We have a very reclusive family. Obviously we've canvassed the neighborhood, spoken to people who've lived there for years and years. Neighbors have related to us that they've never met members of this family," he said.

All three victims had their throats slit and were bludgeoned with what was believed to be a claw hammer, Morgan said, and Richard Thomas Smith, a Department of Homeland Security employee, was also shot in the head, perhaps to incapacitate him before the murders.

"Initial research has led us to believe it was a ritualistic killing," Morgan said. "The method of the murder ... and our person of interest has some ties to a faith or religion that is indicative of that."

The crime appears to have been part of a witchcraft practice linked to the July 31 "blue moon," a reference to the second

of two full moons that appear in a calendar month, Morgan said.

Police discovered the bodies after a colleague of Richard Thomas Smith at Homeland Security reported him missing from work.

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