

Pan Gala

ISSUE #43

A PAGAN JOURNAL FOR THINKING PEOPLE

Pagans and the Land



It's supposed to be an
Earth Religion.

Isn't it?

Pagan spirituality is all about reverence for Nature. But how does what we believe make a difference to the planet? Wrestling with that question may be the most important contribution we can make.

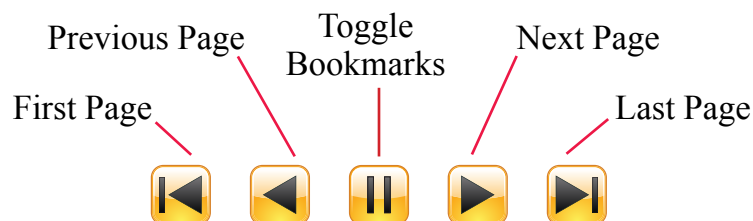


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IN THIS ISSUE: PAGANS AND THE LAND

WHERE IS GAIA WHEN WE NEED HER MOST?

Few cities rivaled New Orleans for its concentration of Witches, magicians, sorcerers, and other Spiritually Aware Folks. If any city in the United States was home to the *Iwa* and the spirits, it was New Orleans. And yet all of that magical power was not enough to turn away a hurricane or to hold the levees in place. What does Hurricane Katrina tell us about our magic, or about the spirits we serve and the gods we honor? These are not easy questions, but they demand an answer nonetheless.

By Kevin Filan... 16

ON LIVING IN ARIZONA

It is a truism within the recovery community that moving halfway across the country can have no affect on your ability to deal with life. By definition, wherever you go, there you are; and whether you've got a desert or a rainforest outside your bedroom window doesn't change what's going on inside your mind and heart. That makes a lot of sense. It's also not always true.

By Caroline Ailanthus, artwork by Bodie Parkhurst... 19

BEYOND GAIA: THE REBIRTH OF ECO-PAGANISM

Ever since James Lovelock first proposed the Gaia hypothesis in the late 1970s, it has become clear that the concept of Gaia has as many religious implications as scientific ones. But too often, people who speak of Gaia as a goddess forget that other natural systems can be understood in the same way. If Gaia is a goddess, in other words, She may not be alone — and today's Pagans may be missing the fact that the gods and goddesses they worship are much closer than they think.

By John Michael Greer, artwork by Bodie Parkhurst... 25

I AM THE MOUNTAIN WALKING

What if I am not only human, but also part of the mountain, and the mountain is part of me? From that perspective, mountains do indeed walk. When I walk, the mountain also walks, because the mountain is part of me. I am the mountain walking. *By Dr. Douglas Ezzy, artwork by Bodie Parkhurst... 29*

THE REWILDING: THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

The first time I visited Innisfree, the owner walked all of it with me. I have never met anyone who knew her homeplace so deeply. She took me into the secret world beyond her cabin; to the wild shoreline, rocky cliffs, willow thickets, and magical places where she'd played as a child. The owner's raw intimacy with this land combined with her spiritual beliefs have led her to want to preserve this particular patch of wilderness in a non-wilderness world.

By Cristina Eisenberg, artwork by Bodie Parkhurst... 39

WHAT CAN I DO? MOVING FROM ANXIETY TO ACTION

Paganism is all about making the world a better place. We may not be able to save the whole world, but we can each make our little corner of it a safer, happier, healthier place. Remember that the gods bestow gifts in proportion to need — we would not have the power of magic if we did not face obstacles that call for it. But despair is not the answer. When you read about depressing things in the news, here are concrete things you can do to counteract the negativity.

By Elizabeth Barrette, artwork by Bodie Parkhurst... 52



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FICTION

MIGRATION

"I first heard about it when Redwood appeared in the desert, dropping his bags with a thud. One of them popped open, spilling a sunrise with scented air redolent with the gradual warming of tree sap and the sound of melting spring snow. Redwood picked it up hurriedly, embarrassed at his own clumsiness."

By Brian K. Lowe, artwork by Suzanne Cheryl Gardner... 21

YUNDAH

Kat dug these graves for me six months before she passed away. She was waning fast, but got up one morning and made sure that every living thing in our care had a place to go when it died. *By C. S. MacCath, artwork by Sharon McLeod... 33*

GARDEN OF SOULS

Kelody waited impatiently for the hatch to release while Rigel methodically locked the console — though the landscape was deserted — remote-linked his cord, then slowly exited as if about to step onto the ice field of a Jovian moon, not midsummer Earth. *By M. Turville Heitz, artwork by Carol Coogan... 44*

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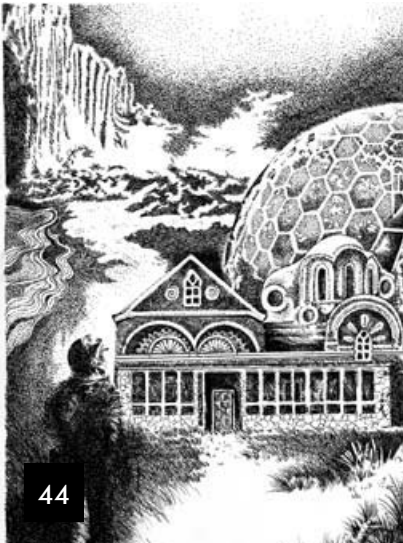
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ABOUT OUR FEATURED ARTIST

Bodie Parkurst writes, paints and illustrates for pleasure and profit and lives with her son in the Pacific Northwest. Her column on mothering in *PanGaia's* sister title *SageWoman* will begin in the spring issue.



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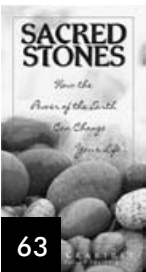


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IMPRESSIONS



Getting Real with Gaia

*A town is saved, not more
by the righteous men in
it than by the woods and
swamps that surround it.*

– Henry David Thoreau

Or not, as the case may be. I've observed a year full of natural disasters. Earth, air, fire, and water all do things from time to time that humans find upsetting. We face earthquakes, landslides, hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, epic droughts, floods, tidal waves, and many other challenges. In every case, the overt force of damage is one that we cannot control; forces of nature aren't weapons or punishments, they simply *are*. In almost every case, however, we have opportunities to increase or decrease the amount of mayhem caused by said forces — and we increase it more often than we decrease it.

The first thing we usually do wrong is pick inappropriate places to live and work. It's tempting to build a resort on the beach, when the sea is blue and calm and beautiful. It's easy to forget that a few months later — every summer in fact — that the very same ocean spawns hurricanes whose winds can flatten the coastline for miles. It's tempting to bracket a river in docks and warehouses, hem it with dykes and dam it for power. It's easy to forget that "river is a verb" and that a placid stream of water will periodically rise with rain and wander in flood, because that is what rivers *do*. It's tempting to build houses and offices all up and down the slopes of a low rolling mountain covered in forest and brush. It's easy to forget

that mountains grow and decay, and sometimes shrug off large amounts of earth and rock at once; and that brush periodically needs to burn away for a forest to remain healthy.

We tend to put ourselves in harm's way because we don't pay *attention* — either we don't notice that something is dangerous, or we use denial to delude ourselves into thinking it won't really affect us. Before anyone complains that I'm unfairly criticizing modern civilization, let me point out that this bad habit is not new; just look at the ruins of ancient Pompeii. But there's no doubt that we've broadened and deepened our tendency to ignore nature, now that technology makes it easier for us to do so on a daily basis.

A great deal of money could be saved and much heartache avoided simply by giving the forces of nature a little more respect, and accordingly, a little more room. If a town wants to be situated near water then it should have zoning laws that require building structures a safe distance back from ocean, lake, and river shores. In some areas, that might mean a few hundred yards; in others, a mile or few. In a mountain resort town, intelligent and thoughtful planning should be required mandating building where slopes are gentle and stable. (Or requiring appropriate engineering if that's not possible.) Builders working on the open plains of North America should use styles resistant to tornados and grass fires, such earth-berm or dome homes. In general, we should design to work with natural laws, not against them.

Even worse than ignoring the natural world is dismantling previously existing protections against disaster. Gaia does not like having to rebuild Her ecosystems unnecessarily, and so the natural world is full of effective buffers for its many challenges. Palm trees grow tough and flexible to withstand hurricanes. Grass and groundcovers anchor the soil on mountainsides and beaches. Marshes and floodplains allow rivers to rise and fall and wander within reason, keeping them from straying too far afield. Trees grow thick bark to protect them from intermittent forest fires, and deep roots to resist wind and erosion. The list of buffers is intricate and endless, and most developers don't bother to read it before ripping it up.

In order to build right down to the water's edge, we routinely drain and fill swamps, dyke and dam rivers. Such actions cause the body of water in question to lose some of its flexibility and its capacity to absorb normal fluctuations without going dry or overflowing. In order to get the best views on the mountain, we strip away the plants whose roots bind the soil together and absorb rainfall; of course, as a result the soil loses some of its ability to buffer landslips, heavy rainfall and fire. In order to obtain lumber for houses and the cheapest price, we clear-cut forests, and the air gets a little filthier, the rainfall runs away a little faster ... and the global climate gradually gets more hyperactive. Bit by bit, we have reduced Gaia's ability to maintain moderate conditions favorable to life on Earth.

The point is: every time we fail to pay attention to our natural environment, we set ourselves up for grief. There isn't anything vengeful about this process, any more than it's vengeful for a rock to hit you on the head if you toss it up and stand where it's going

PanGaia

Issue #43 —

January - March 2006

Publisher

Blessed Bee, Inc. aka BBI Media

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e-mail: www.bbimedia.com/email

PanGaia welcomes submissions of non-fiction, fiction, poetry, reviews, photography and art from women and men of all Earth-affirming spiritual paths. For submission guidelines or queries, please email the Managing Editor at www.bbimedia.com/email

PanGaia (ISSN 1096-0996, USPS #017-947) is published quarterly.

Contents ©2005, 2012 BBI Media, Inc. *PanGaia* is a member of the Independent Press Association. Printed in the United States on recycled paper.

to fall. The rock doesn't want to punish you, it's just obeying the law of gravity. As Pagans, most of us know about these laws, and we try to do our best to live lightly. But it isn't enough for we Pagans to dance around a bonfire on the sabbats and honor Mother Earth with our words. We have to find ways of inspiring the rest of humanity to listen to Her as well.

Why us? Because we're among those who care the most about nature. We're willing to *work* to make changes where needed. We know that in a relationship, you get what you see — you can't change your lover. That's true whether your love is a man or a woman, or the sea. The sea will always be the sea, gentle one day and savage the next, and those who turn their back on her will regret it. Those who love her, make accommodations for her ferocity as well as her beauty.

In the end, the answer to "Why us?" comes down to one last, vital point. The law of nature is adapt or die. And while others might be tempted to forget, we remember, for to us nature is sacred.

For this issue of *PanGaia*, we have collected features that explore the relationship between Pagans and the Land. Kevin Filan begins by taking the bull by the horns in his guest editorial "Where Is Gaia When We Need Her Most?" which explores why New Orleans, the capitol city of magic, got hammered by a hurricane. Watch for Kevin's new column on magic, ethics and more beginning in *PanGaia* #44. Next is "On Living in Arizona" in which Caroline Ailanthus explores the relationship between land and resident.

John Michael Greer takes an intensely scientific look at Earth spirituality — or an intensely spiritual look at Earth science, depending on your perspective. His article "Beyond Gaia: The Rebirth of Eco-Paganism" traces the his-

tory of environmental awareness from ancient to modern times with some startling hypothesis that link the ancient deities to modern environmental science.

"I Am the Mountain Walking" by Douglas Ezzy is a deeply meditative essay about what it means to be a moving, thinking part of the planet. Nature writer and columnist Cristina Eisenberg shares the story of a detailed ecological survey she did in "The Rewilding: The Lake Isle of Innisfree." We realized that these articles, especially taken together, might seem a little bleak, so I worked up "What Can I Do? Moving from Anxiety to Action" to offer positive ideas about how we can make a difference in what future we live in.

Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction: but sometimes the most important truths are best conveyed with story. We received three spectacular fiction submissions for this issue and we couldn't choose between them so we printed all three. Brian K. Lowe's "Migration" tells of a new kind of refugee; "Yundah" by C.S. McCath is a near-future story about all-too-plausible environmental disaster; and "Garden of Souls" by M. Turville Heitz looks far ahead and ponders what the homeworld really means to us.

Our "Toe to Toe" topic "Should We Hunt for a Pagan Paradise?" explores the appeals of moving somewhere Pagan-friendly or trying to improve the place you already are. Finally, a note: both Joanna Powell Colbert and Cristina Eisenberg are taking the winter off, but they and their columns will be back in #44. We hope you find this issue as stimulating and engaging as we did in putting it together. ▲

— Elizabeth Barrette is the Managing Editor of *PanGaia*. She lives in Charleston, Illinois. You can write her c/o *PanGaia* or email www.bbimedia.com/email.