

No. 48

Pan Gala

A PAGAN JOURNAL FOR THINKING PEOPLE

John
Michael
Greer

Path of the Green Druid

Peak oil, climate change, and industrial collapse will bring the end of life as we know it, believes author and Grand Arch Druid John Michael Greer. But it's not all bad news: he sees Paganism as powerful force for continuity, hope, and change in a time of transformation towards a more liveable future.

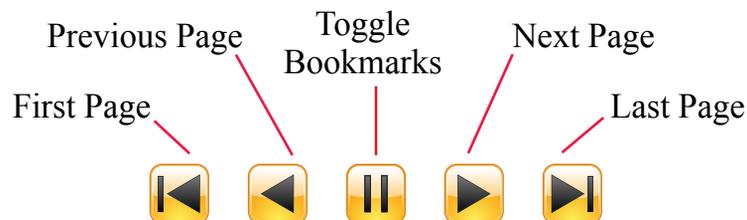


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ON THE COVER:

John Michael Greer — Path of the Green Druid

Best known for his work in ceremonial magic and Druidry, John Michael Greer also maintains a passionate interest in the environment. His first book, *Paths of Wisdom*, was published in 1996, and has been followed by eight more, with three books forthcoming.

John is the seventh Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America, as well as being an active member of the Druid fellowship *ArnDraiocht Fein*, and the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids. Knowing of John's deep interest in the topic of this issue — science and spirit in a time of global transformation — we managed to get John to stop writing long enough to sit down and talk with us. *Interview by Elizabeth Barrette... 20*

PanGaia: A Pagan Journal for Thinking People

SPECIAL SECTION: SCIENCE, MAGIC, AND PLANETARY CHANGE

Peak Oil, Industrial Collapse, and What Pagans Can Do About It

As members of the Pagan community in the first decade of the 21st century, we need to face up to the hard realities of a world in crisis. *By John Michael Greer ... 23*

After the House of Straw: Pagan Perspectives on Peak Oil

As a Neo-Pagan I'm accustomed to see in destruction the potential for renewal. That could be the case for Peak Oil as well, but we must begin a transition to a saner, more sustainable way of life soon. In some respects, we Neo-Pagans — who keep close ties to the earth and will endure hardships to practice our faith — may thrive in this new time. *By Burdock ... 27*

When the Wheel Wobbles: a Witch's View of Climate Change

After years of celebrating them, I've learned to appreciate the unique energy of the eight Sabbats. I've also learned to recognize the often subtle but always powerful shift in energy that occurs as one Sabbat passes into the next. But what would it be like if Beltaine no longer felt like Beltaine? *By Treesong ... 31*

Why We Love the Apocalypse: Religious Roots of Peak Oil Doomerism

After I wrote an article suggesting that Peak Oil may lead "merely" to widespread unemployment and hardship rather than collapse, hundreds wrote to tell me I was a naïve optimist and a cornucopian. While the end of the oil era possesses a "death and taxes" certitude, plausible post-peak scenarios span a wide scope. So why is the most extreme hypothesis the most widely known? I began to wonder why we seem to be so drawn to the idea of our own extinction. *By Rob Hemenway ... 34*



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The people on this planet were Gnostic Christian vegetarians or such. On doc they seemed harmless enough. But sometimes well-meaning Gnostic Christian vegetarians tried to burn you at the stake as a witch for your trouble. *By Peter Charron* ... 42

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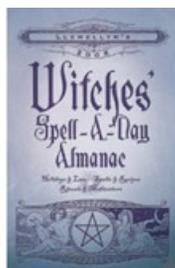
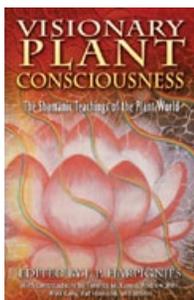
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Paganism and the Planet

I am myself and what is around me, and if I do not save it, it will not save me.

— Jose Ortega y Gasset

We are a part of the Earth, and the Earth is part of us. We are not cogs in some cosmic clock; we are cells in a body, our lives bound up inextricably with that of the whole biosphere. We can survive outside it to about the extent that our blood cells can survive outside our bodies: briefly.

Right now the chief difference between Paganism and most other religions is that we remember this, while a majority of other religions have forgotten it. Some people really like that cog-in-clock metaphor. They like the idea that the world is mechanical: regular, reliable, meticulous. They like the idea that no individual person, animal, plant, or species is unique and irreplaceable. If it wears out or dies out, no problem; you can just throw it out and get a new one. Except the world doesn't actually work that way. Evolution is a deucedly lazy mechanic. When a piece of the biosphere goes missing, it takes a very long time for something else to evolve to replace it — and in the meantime, everything else that relied on that piece either dies for lack of it or limps along at reduced efficiency. It makes more sense to keep the system running smoothly in the first place, and that's where it helps to remember how bad things will get if it doesn't.

So here we are looking at a bunch of situations where big important parts are wobbling

and threatening to fall clean off the clock ... where many of the Earth's vital organs are showing stress and signs of imminent collapse. The waterways, the Earth's blood, are polluted; they carry more poisons and fewer nutrients all the time. The forests, the Earth's lungs, are so reduced in mass that the wheezing climate can hardly blow the rains where they belong or turn carbon dioxide into oxygen we ourselves can breathe. And deep down in the Earth, like a layer of rich fat, lie the fossil fuels that hold ancient energy locked in storage. Just as a body can't sustain indefinitely a lifestyle that burns more calories than it takes in, the Earth can't sustain indefinitely our lifestyle when it uses up more energy than is currently being renewed.

This is all fairly obvious, or at least it should be. But humans are masters of denying the obvious, or reframing it in less obvious ways, or otherwise convincing themselves that the clock is not about to stop and the horse they're beating is not about to drop dead underneath them. Global warming, peak oil, and a host of related issues are all unpalatable and unpopular because — if true, if even partly true — they will force changes that most people simply don't want to live with. So they choose a different metaphor, or a different myth, and they tell themselves that things really aren't that bad.

They might not be. Then again, they might. We won't know until it happens, and then it will be much too late. Certainly, we won't know unless we take a good hard look at the incoming data,

and keep updating our observations as time passes.

How accurate are the predictions? Well ... remember that "global warming isn't real" and "Peak Oil is a leftist exaggeration" are brought to you by some of the same people who think that stock market prices or housing prices can keep going up forever, and always seem to be caught painfully off-guard when the inevitable crash comes. So consider the source.

Paganism tells us a lot about how the Earth works and how life works, because it's not a revelatory religion but an experiential one. Its rules are mapped out in the world around us. It tells us that everything is connected, and so we realize that when carbon fuels burn, they don't "go away" but rather go into the air which then goes into us. It tells us that everything is cyclical, and so energy must be renewed as well as used — the way the Earth grows in the summer and rests in the winter, burning summer's fuel to survive while preparing for the next green season. It tells us that what goes up must come down, and so we know to prepare for that. It tells us that "as above, so below," the large is reflected and manifested in the small; so if the Earth is poisoned and ravaged of energy, it should be no surprise that more and more humans are finding their bodies damaged by environmental toxins and chronically exhausted.

But even as the Earth warns us what is not possible, it shows us what *is* possible. Renewable fuel sources exist: wood and water, wind and sun, probably some other things we haven't figured out how to use yet. The hydrosphere flows over the whole Earth, endlessly moving, eternally renewed, and full of tremendous energy. A forest is a fantastically intricate combination of plants, animals,

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soil and water and air. Its organisms feed on each other's waste products in a dynamic balance. People are just starting to experiment with vehicles that run on waste, such as used frying oil; or factories that group together so that one manufacturer's waste heat provides the boiling water that the next manufacturer needs to create its product.

Now take that quote this editorial started with, and turn it around: if we save the Earth, the Earth will save us. After all, when you run for safety, you don't leave your ass behind, even if it is an ass. It's part of you, and you're going to need it later. So too, we are part of the Earth. By devoting our efforts to preserving its resources and repairing the damage done, we can improve our life security and quality.

We're apes ... but we're smart apes. There is not much that human ingenuity can't figure out, given time and tools. The important thing is that we actually bend our minds to the task. In this case it means learning what's going wrong with the climate so we can help it relocate its balance, and devising other ways of moving things around — or not needing to move so much, so far — than by burning fossil fuels. And for those of us in the Pagan field, it means figuring out ways to convince other folks that our planet is not a clock, but a living creature ... in words that don't make them want to reach for a gas can and a torch.

On that note, our theme this issue is "Science, Spirit, and Planetary Change." In our cover interview, I'm speaking with John Michael Greer to find out his thoughts on what the future has in store for us. He has also written a sidebar to that piece, "John Michael Greer on Peak Oil, Industrial Collapse, and What Pagans Can Do About It."

Supporting articles expand on the same core concepts. "After the House of Straw: Pagan Perspectives on Peak Oil" by Burdock looks into the dangers of building a society on an unsustainable foundation, and what Paganism can do to help bail out that situation. In "When the Wheel Wobbles: A Witch's View of Climate Change," Treesong examines one of the repercussions of fossil fuel use and other environmentally unfriendly policies. Finally, there is a counterpoint perspective analyzing peak oil in the context of religious hysteria: "Why We Love the Apocalypse: Religious Roots of Peak Oil Doomerism" by Toby Hemenway.

On the brighter side, we have several pieces that take a more positive view, envisioning that humanity survives to visit the stars ... and bring our religion with us. C.S. MacCath draws on heathen history to explore what could happen when an Asatru proselytizes to aliens, in her poem "Bringing Woden to the Little Green Men". Peter Charron shares a story of a shaman who helps a human colony make peace with ghosts in "Exoshaman."

Additional poems this issue include "Son of Cronos" by Anthony Bernstein, "The God at Winter" by Katherine Clark, and "Segue" by Connie Werner Reichert. Wrapping up with our departments, we have "The Magician" by Caroline Ailanthus in "Point of View," an examination of a favorite archetype; and "Does Paganism discriminate against men?" in "Toe to Toe." Got something to say about those? Write to us and you may see your letter appear in "Feedback Loop!" ▲

— *This issue is Elizabeth Barrette last as Managing Editor of PanGaia. She lives in Charleston, Illinois. You can write her email her at ysabet@worthlink.net.*