

There Goes The Neighborhood

by R. G. Miga



A pagan anti-capitalist website is a strange venue for someone as egregiously suburban as I am. I was raised in America's Rust Belt, in an affluent neighborhood surrounded by the ruins of an industrious Golden Age. My family was vaguely Protestant; growing up, I went through the typical perambulations of atheism and Buddhism and "spiritual" without really settling anywhere.

Then occultism found me out of nowhere in 2019.

I'm not inclined to mystical explanations—or at least I wasn't, until recently—but discovering [Alan Moore's "Fossil Angels"](#) felt like a tap on the shoulder from an invisible hand. I wasn't looking for it. I

didn't set out to jettison the way I'd understood the world for my entire adult life. The New Age crystal-shop variety of magic(k) was familiar; I thought it was a ridiculous scam for delusional pretenders. Didn't even know who Alan Moore was, apart from a vague association with his graphic novels. And yet there he was, improbably interviewed on a mainstream politics podcast—talking about the creative potential of liminal spaces, of the no-joke magic of language, of art's weird power when properly done. That first interview led me to "Fossil Angels," Moore's ruthlessly pragmatic description of magic, stripped of the dubious pageantry and costuming and historical recreation—raw creativity, drawing on hidden realms of consciousness—hooked me instantly. I followed those first whispers into the shadowy catacombs of contemporary occultism: [Gordon White's animism](#), [Aidan Wachter's dirt sorcery](#), [Josephine McCarthy's](#) enchanted stewardship of place. There was a secret history of living mythology that I never knew existed. It brought color back into my own desaturated world. I was Born Again Weird and haven't looked back since.

I'm still new to the scene—late to the party, inexperienced, overdressed. Feeling like I showed up to a death metal concert in a white polo shirt.

But please, hear me out.

This is not a travelogue about my exciting journey into "discovering" paganism. I won't subject you to a self-important conversion narrative about how I overcame my woefully materialist upbringing to unlock the Secrets of the Universe.

Instead, I'd like to ask for forgiveness on behalf of people like myself.

Paganism has rightly been the provenance of outsiders: those excluded from mainstream society, forced to build their own power from scratch. People who turn up in these spaces from comfortable backgrounds like mine are often dilettantes, day-trippers, tourists—or, worse yet, academics. They venture out from neocolonial enclaves into these dark tunnels for an illicit thrill. Their livelihoods—indeed, their lives—don't depend on their ability to renegotiate reality. Reality is doing just fine by them.

Or at least it was, until the Apocalypse kicked off.

This is not hyperbolic. We're not (yet?) in a falling-sky, scorched-earth, Hollywood blockbuster-style Apocalypse. Rather, the past two decades have been apocalyptic in the original sense: a sudden uncovering, the rending of the temple curtain, the revelation of things as they truly are. The defining events of the twenty-first century so far—the World Trade Center attacks, the subsequent wars, the

financial collapse, Donald Trump, COVID-19, the new Cold War—all seem purpose-built to strip away the notion that our cherished institutions can keep the world safe.

This is not news to most of the world's people. The poor and the marginalized never had any illusions about state-sponsored security. The elites who live in sprawling archipelagos of private wealth can buy their own safety until the sun burns out. But for those of us still living in our fragile twentieth-century terrariums, busily watering the lawns and believing everything printed in the brochures, the past twenty years have been panic-inducing.

For me, it wasn't the fear of the disasters themselves that shook me out of my old worldview. I don't remember having a dramatic existential crisis. Instead, I experienced the slow, dawning realization that the leaders who were supposed to be in charge were failing spectacularly at every turn. If the self-proclaimed experts in my country were blindsided by a third-rate grifter like Trump, what else were they getting wrong? The people driving the bus can't admit that they're lost and refuse to ask for directions. So I got off the bus, ontologically speaking. I lost faith in the whole project of modernity and went searching for something new.

I suspect many people are going through the same process. It's a safe bet that increasing alienation from modernity is driving [the recent Occult Renaissance](#). The sudden proliferation of crystals and tarot decks and [TikTok incantations](#) (and their inevitable commercial sterilization) might be written off as a fad; the historic rise in what could be generally referred to as ["symptoms of despair," especially among young people](#), could be shoulder-shrugged away as too complex to explain—mystified as "declining mental health," whatever that means. But you don't need a medical degree (in fact, it helps if you *don't* have one) to connect the dots: imperial capitalism's [spectacular betrayal](#) of everyone but the uber-rich; a [justified horror](#) among people clocking their vanishing chances for a secure livelihood on a habitable planet; the embrace of an alternative reality that doesn't [make them feel like powerless, expendable serfs](#).

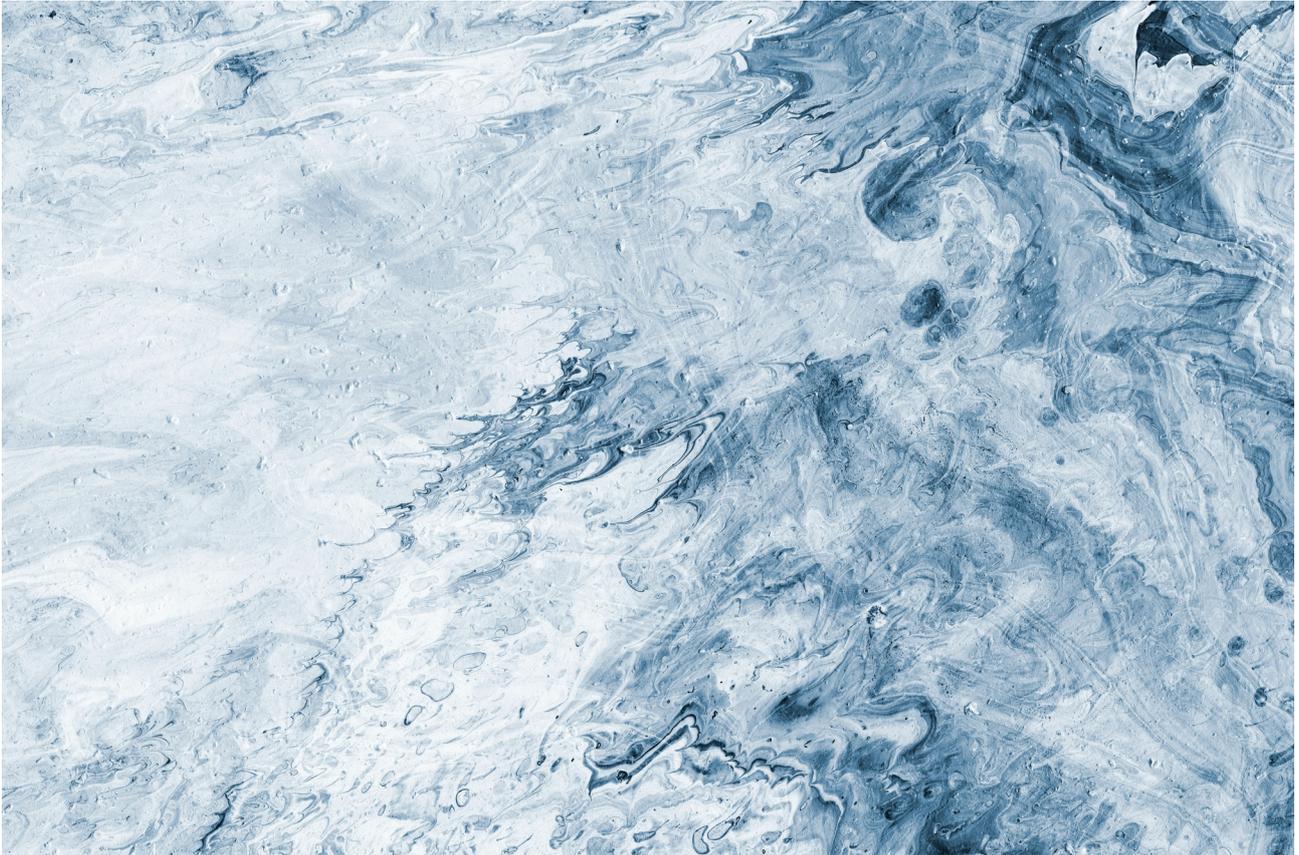
Paganism—restoring our relationships with the natural world, with the mythic history of humanity, with the powers that sustain us apart from the state—could be exactly the alternative we need to overcome our past mistakes and build something new. But this will take a great show of patience and generosity toward people who are, frankly (and I count myself among them) pretty goddamned clueless.

As a recent convert, blinking in the outer darkness, eyes still dazzled from the fluorescence of modernity, searching for the stars above, I can understand the temptation for paganism to keep its gates closed. Y'all figured it out before we did. People choosing to live close to nature and the

numinous have been ridiculed for centuries. It was easy for “civilized” cosmopolitans to laugh at these strange gods and sacred groves, or do much worse, back when reductive materialism still (briefly) had the Mandate of Heaven.

That world is crumbling now. Its temples are falling. The old power structures that got us this far are strained to the breaking point, and there are more catastrophes on the horizon, more shocks than the system can absorb. We all know the litany of lamentations by now. Climate change is ramping up. The global financial system is faltering. Political instability and domestic terrorism are on the rise, while decrepit ex-empires fight pointless wars abroad in a doomed attempt to justify their existence. Mainstream religion is succumbing to the dry rot of mundane corruption. Choosing a single contemporary example as an illustration of any of these trends seems pointless. The shocks are coming so relentlessly that any single event is instantly displaced; in fact, framing the catastrophe as a succession of discrete events—rather than a rising tide of roiling instability—feels like a coping mechanism, an artificial compartmentalization that doesn’t honestly describe reality.

The metaphor of a flood of problems is an ancient cliché. Unfortunately, it’s also the most illustrative description of where we find ourselves, and not just because actual floods promise to be the defining crisis of our climate-altered future. The striking thing about catastrophic floods is how unremarkable they seem at first. Unlike earthquakes or fires or tornadoes, a flood doesn’t immediately announce itself; bystanders can see that there is a lot of water, but it’s hard to tell if it’s actually rising, and it happens so gradually that people doubt what they’re seeing. Life goes on uninterrupted mere feet away from the impending torrent; the ground is still dry and solid, and surely the water must be receding by now. Then, suddenly, the levee breaks, or the sea wall crumbles. Even after cars start floating away, the surreality of it—the slow, creeping, unhurried inundation—makes it hard to take seriously, and surely the water can’t get higher than this, right? This is as bad as it gets. And then the buildings lift off their foundations and travel downstream, sailing away on the new inland sea. The ground melts. Everything that was taken for granted as solid and immovable is levitated away. Normalcy isn’t immediately destroyed, burned or blown away or shaken to the ground; the world is just displaced—gently at first, as if those cars and buildings could still be salvaged, if someone could only make this mischievous water put them back where they belong—until, eventually, everything is stripped away and heaved into a pile of wreckage.



This is where we are. Even if the literal floodwaters don't come for us, the rushing currents of cultural and political instability will leave almost all of us washed out of our comfortable materialist worldviews. In an ironic inversion of a too-familiar problem, the citizens of the most fortified countries on the planet are falling victim to the psychic trauma of a disordered world, adrift within their own borders—"internally displaced," in the anodyne parlance of geopolitics. Spiritually dispossessed. Shocked to be told that, sorry, the maps haven't been updated yet; the place you're trying to go doesn't exist anymore, and all that money you have doesn't spend like it once did.

There is no "normal" to go back to. The fleeting stability of the old world was always built too far into the floodplains, both figuratively and literally. The beneficiaries of this brief historical moment borrowed as much time as they could and partied hard on high-interest credit. Now [the bill is coming due](#). Suddenly, the people who enjoyed protection within the walls of modernity are the ones in need of mercy. They don't know any other way to live. And history is littered with examples of what happens when comfortable people lose their place: without a better alternative, a few authoritarian atrocities become a small price to pay for the return of the status quo.

Before you leave them to their ignorance, I would respectfully remind you of how thoroughly and deliberately misdirected we've all been these past two millennia (give or take a few hundred years.) The combined power of Church and State and Academy is a triumph of authoritarian control, the

product of many centuries of innovation in shutting down human potential. We didn't know any better. Ignorance shouldn't be forgotten, but it can be forgiven.

We need a new way of being in the world because the old one is crumbling. Those titanic, rigid structures built by imperialism can't withstand the flood of calamities that is coming, has already started to seep under the foundations. But networks of responsive, resourceful, self-sufficient communities—the kind that got us through the last Ice Age—have always been more resilient. People can build something better with a genuine commitment to a living earth and identities that transcend ideology. We can make sacred the things that sustain us and reclaim our shared history as star-guided stewards of creation, as we once were for hundreds of thousands of years.

We need paganism, in other words.

This will take some patient education from the people who never lost sight of the stars in the first place. Modernity's refugees will be scared and confused and traumatized, ill-equipped for life after the Apocalypse. But we can get through it together—if latecomers like me can be forgiven for our ignorance.

R.G. Miga



R.G. Miga is a writer living in the Finger Lakes region of central New York State, exploring the genres of magical realism and solarpunk in addition to nonfiction essays.