

The Age of Oceanus

Everyone would remember where they were the day the first river goddess died.

The viral video came from Mexico, spreading first across the internet and then across the news, as such things go. It was the slightest bit grainy, caught at the early stages of dusk with what must have been a cellular phone. Chalchiuhtlicue, a goddess long since presumed dead along with most of the Aztec tradition, dragged herself onto the muddy bank of the Rio Grande, jade skirt slicked with oil and winged headdress tangled with plastic six-pack rings that captured other plastic jetsam of a species driving itself, and its world, to extinction. Chalchiuhtlicue managed to stand, stagger a hunched step, and lift her face to the camera with her mouth open in a silent plea before she fell face-first in the mud.

All this came accompanied, of course, with cries of surprise in the crisp sibilance of Northern Mexican Spanish, "*Mira, mira, que es eso?*" According to sources, this was not the only sighting of Chalchiuhtlicue in the last decade. Other locals reported having seen the wide-hipped *diosa*, in varying states of filth. A drilling technician's wife even reported a midnight sighting of Chalchiuhtlicue in which the goddess opened her mouth, allegedly with a look of desperate warning on her face, when heaps of stinking fish poured, dead, from her mouth.

It was not the first sighting, but it was the only one with clear footage, decisively clearer than any clips of UFOs or Yetis or Nessies or *chupacabras* or ghosts or any other wonders of cryptozoology, conspiracy, myth, or religion. However, it would be the last sighting of Chalchiuhtlicue, for there she lay, face down in a heap of oil and trash and mud, and there she would remain.

In the weeks following the death of Chalchiuhtlicue, videos and photographs and reported sightings of other dying river goddesses poured into news stations. Images of increasing quality emerged as something of a sport developed, like tornado chasing or whale watching, wherein professional videographers and hobby photographers camped out along the world's most significant and polluted rivers in the hope of capturing the perfect shot. Ganga making one last ride past Rishikesh, the lotus in her hand wilted, her crocodile steed coughing up what could only be described as human sewage, Ganga herself shivering with the cold of death in spite of the mid-October heat. The hag Peg Powler rising from the River Tees in Dinsdale Park at sunset, water steaming against her skin that bulged with what looked like the embers of coal beneath it, her green hair slashing out like serpents and wrapping around nearby children in an attempt to drag them with her into death as their parents tugged and tugged (leading viewers to wonder what kind of person would stand by and film this), until her hair finally flopped to the ground like limp spaghetti as the burning coals inside her glowed brighter, the steam around her thickened, and finally she plopped into the water and floated away, burnt like a pork roast left in for too long. Still shots of Oba lying akimbo atop the dam at the Ogbomoso reservoir. And the sightings kept coming.

News pundits debated the veracity of the videos; politicians largely ignored them; conspiracy theories developed; cults formed; scientists shook their heads, for even if they could come up with some explanation for what seemed like another worldwide natural disaster, the ever-changing climate had proven time and again that nobody with enough power would listen.

Still, one thing was certain: everybody remembered where they were when they saw Chalchiuhtlicue die, and even those who would deny what they saw felt a clenching somewhere between their heart and their belly, a voice deep down telling them that the time to reverse the tides of the changing world had passed. In its place, a new age—one of learning to survive in a dying world or choosing to die with it—had begun.