

Ten Lamps



An archetale of the [Assembling Terrania Cycle](#)

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Just about everybody has an opinion about where the Ten Lamps came from and what they really mean.

With the rediscovery of a handwritten copy, the first ever found, the Lamps are back in the news. Here is what CBA News recently reported:

“The paper is a wrinkled notepad sheet. The writing, sloping lines of capital letters, are difficult to read... Experts say the right-handed author was either in a hurry or wrote in a lazy hand...”

The DNN version:

“Followers of the Way of Ten Lamps have kept vigil throughout the night, chanting, fasting, and waiting their turn to see what they regard as a holy manuscript miraculously preserved...”

FUX News “reported” thus just before it went under:

“The document, probably a forgery, seeks to undermine traditional Judeo-Christian values...”

The truth is that the Lamps were written down in a spirit of play. I should know. I am the Ten Lamps, a wayward creation of a musing, wandering dreamer.

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Why not? As with all beings, I emerged from potentiality into actuality via the imaginal: from Infrarealm to Coaguum, with the Dreamvale hovering between them. From the back of beyond to

the flight of busy fingers. This cosmology is consistent with Lamp 2, the Lamp of Animate Being: “Everything in the cosmos at every level is alive and communicative in its own way.” Including me.

It’s troubling that people have taken me for a literal truth, whether for or against it. I was never intended to be on par with a historical fact or a number on a temperature scale. I live outside the arbitrary oppositions of fact vs. myth, truth vs. fantasy, waking vs. dream. Fortunately, fewer and fewer people cut up the world like that anymore.

Where to start the inside story of how I came to be? The soaring temperatures of climate chaos? A historical as well as ecological catastrophe. A catastrophe on every level. So was the 21st-century resurgence of worldwide white supremacy and authoritarianism long latent. The list goes on, as every student of history knows.

Not well known is how the foggy figure known as Simeon began jotting down imaginings about how things *could* be on troubled Planet Earth, not just about how they were at the time.

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Inhabiting a series of rental homes, ever on the move, Simeon had studied what went right in healthy human cultures: the kind that fill basic needs and support mental and physical blossoming. He was especially interested in worldviews in which humans are essentially social, on an arc of lifelong maturation, and interconnected with everything.

As he studied and mused, Simeon watched the fascism of religious fundamentalism join hands with the factism of barren rationalism. One day they would found SMOKE: Suppressive Materialism and Obtrusive Knowability Enforcement. Theater, pageantry, Halloween, and May Day would be outlawed by gun-pointing literalists eager to purify culture of anything fantastic. But that was down the road.

Meanwhile, as wars raged on with ever deadlier weapons, pandemics recurred, and Earth’s climate overheated, shrinking coastlines and displacing billions, Simeon saw around and within him a universe not of separate competing units, but vital beings combined into an intelligent, self-organizing whole.

As Simeon drank coffee one morning and saw treetops softened by a dawn mist, the first Lamp flashed on: “The nature of the cosmos is ever-unfolding creative diversity, an infinite variety of affiliating voices, entities, and presences.” That was where we all lived, he thought, if only we would realize it. Everything was relational. The glow of this perception warmed him against the dark, not as a certainty or an absolute truth, but as a guiding light, the first of a triangle of ten.

It is difficult for people of today to grasp the violent chaos of those times, popularly known as the Darker Ages, there at the start of the Resource Wars led by governments of lawyer-backed brigands fighting over what mineral, fossil, and agricultural richness remained even as polar ice dried up, ocean life died, and population numbers of every species dropped. Because old attitudes, institutions, and ways of living were clung to, especially by privileged elites, the necessary dying to them turned outward in a kind of mass suicide.

Although Simeon had been born into the middle class of a wealthy nation, even he was impacted. A survivor of a violent childhood, a perpetual outsider at odds with his own highly militarized

government, he watched his father die in agony and his sister go mad. He saw reservoirs dry up, cities decline, and entire city blocks stripped of copper, lithium, nickel, and gallium by bands of brazen thieves. For him, fantasy was no mere retreat, but a haven of fugitive creativity.

In such a darkening world, I clung as one Lamp to the uncertain possibility of being fully born. At any time, Simeon might abandon me to more “practical” endeavors. So I waited.

Since childhood, Simeon had perceived objects—plants, stones, hills, roads, cars, even cities—as presences. His wedding ring slipped off his finger and into the sea shortly before his divorce; his books had shelf placement preferences; locations where he lived appeared as persons in his dreams. To understand these uncanny events he read indigenous accounts about the spirit of place: this mountain, that river, all of it ensouled.

While he pondered all this in light of the First Lamp, the Second switched on: “Everything in the cosmos at every level is alive and communicative in its own way.”

Which almost immediately lit the Third: “We are inwardly linked to the intelligence of Earth, the cosmos, the presence of place, and one another in relations of mutual reciprocity.” Old news to some, perhaps, but freshly formulated in a consciousness turned simultaneously outward and back upon itself.

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Now, it may seem as though Simeon thought all this up alone, with help of course from his deep studies. But though an outsider to the goosestepping march of his nation, he enjoyed close friendships, networked with other philosopher-taletellers, conversed long and deeply with romantic partners, played with children, and studied with wise teachers from many societies. He also watched his dreams. At no time did he work entirely by himself, recognizing (as had Mary Shelley long ago) the dangers of the solitary anti-relational path.

His dreaming and his love of fiction and fantasy blended with explorations of the Hermetic Way. This path of imaginative insight wound outward from Alexandria, influencing the alchemical search for wisdom, Islamic mystics like Suhrawardi and Ibn ‘Arabi, Goethe, European Romanticism, and Jung. Similar paths reached forward from China, India, Africa, and elsewhere imaginal knowledge received due reverence.

With this support, Simeon’s musings ignited the Lamp of Imaginal Gnosis, typed out on a cool spring morning: “The imaginal realm has its own reality and inspires not by absolute belief, but by belief *in*; not by the ‘real’ but by the ideal.”

He was well aware of how the real suffered. As Earth’s surface degenerated into the gloomy Underworld of so many mythologies, Simeon heard environmental activists with good intentions pound their opponents with ugly facts and figures, to no avail. Those who might have listened were alienated, and so the carnage continued, enabled by citizens who preferred grandiose lies to hard truths—and who could blame them? Humanity, Simeon saw, was a creature more of story than of fact.

And so Lamp 5: “When our guiding stories come from fear and constriction, we block our humanity and cause harm; but when they are humane and expansive, they allow us to appreciate each other and the beauty of Earth and cosmos.”

By this time I was five Lamps, a flickering pentad, a partial tree, half a tetractys. Five Lamps of Being and Story, so far. With each illumination, advising Simeon grew easier. What would come next?

Next lit the Lamps of Togetherness and Futurity. Like a flame passed from candle to candle, the inspiration that kindled the first five Lamps awakened the next five. As I whispered steadily into his ear, Simeon pounded his keyboard like a manic organist, sat back, made a few edits, breathed out, and smiled.

Ten points in a pyramid. Echoes of Pythagoras, the music of the spheres, the four elements, the creative nodes of Kabbalah, and the four directions. And the number ten: fingers, toes, the decimal and metric systems, an order of magnitude, the Chinese and Roman symbol X, the sum of the first three primes, the incarnations of Vishnu, the Tarot Wheel of Fortune.

Then the Wheel spun, and the pyramid of light went out.

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In public, that is, and even in the consciousness of those who most appreciated the glow of the Lamps. The unconscious was another matter.

When reactionaries like those who would found SMOKE one day began attacking all forms of organized fantasy, these zealots enlisted and developed the brain-scanning equipment then in use. Visit a speakeasy theater, read the wrong books, listen to the wrong storytellers, and an arc of bright metal passed over your skull would reveal the heresy to the ideological inquisitors. Punishment, called “adjustment,” ran the scale from heavy fines to secret execution.

Naturally, people opposed this, especially creative people. A few vocal religious and political leaders spoke out; most were silent. What was an underground to do?

Oppressors never reckon with the human unconscious. Not the deep levels. They do draft for-sale psychologists to devise methods for deceiving followers, but, as diehard literalists, they never plumb the depths, because the whole person does not exist for them. For them, there are no depths, just pliable selves and layers of self-deceit to tap.

Learned in the humanities, the underground of practical dreamers knew that. The engineers and technicians among them reversed the brain scanning equipment to lay down fragments of Shakespeare and Sappho, Jemison and Jones across so many neural webs throughout the body that a scan could not detect them. But neither could their bearers remember them.

Only a recall code could resurface the fragments, a code always carried by someone else in the underground. Even codes were hidden, weaving an elaborate net of linkages fully known by nobody but ignitable by many at the appropriate times. Which were few during those highly monitored days.

Picture an office manager typing an encrypted message for another member of the underground: a cook in charge of, say, countering religious anti-fantasy propaganda. The manager wishes to underline her message with a helpful principle she cannot recall.

So her partner sends a recall code, and the receiver remembers Lamp 7: “Humanity must learn to relate as appreciative adults to the primal powers of the cosmos—Source, Wisdom, Attraction, Destruction, Expansion, Contraction, and others imaged as deities—instead of either ignoring them or subordinating ourselves to them.” This Lamp reflected the obvious truth that the slip from worshipping a god to worshipping an authority figure was often and easily made.

Her message complete, the manager promptly forgets Lamp 7 and recall code and goes back to scheduling meetings for busy colleagues. But 7 lingers in her body’s neurological intelligence, ready for a safe time to reemerge.

You can imagine how this felt on my end. For years I lived in a state of far-flung dissociation. I did remain whole in Simeon’s mind, though, because he was seen as a crank not worth interrogating. After his death, I descended into dreamlike partiality.

Long after Simeon, then, who had spread the Lamps before social media algorithms devised by techno-fascists hunted them down and snuffed them out, the flickering lights of hope waited in the dark of a thousand poetic souls until reignited by the code.

Because of Lamp 7, the underground called itself the Transdaimonic League.

The recall code consisted of me, of course, each Lamp a flame for rekindling subversive recognition.

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Despite such precautions, a day came when so many Leaguers died that I began to fear for my life.

Superstorms, floods, heat waves, drone assaults by rare earths stealers, worldwide crop failures, hypersonic missile attacks, nano-enhanced paramilitaries destroying electrical grids—and the resulting chaos used by strongmen to bully millions into regressing into passive followers: all this and more felt like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse stamping their hoofprints everywhere. National and regional governments were so busy grabbing what remained that all other concerns went unheeded.

“When there is no vision, the people perish”; but even people with a vision perished. The Lamps were fictions playfully written down, but they symbolized living ideals that Leaguers gave their lives and livelihoods to uphold. By refusing to steal, deceive, or harm others (Lamps 6 and 8), by believing in their dreams (Lamps 4 and 10), they paid heavy prices to embrace ideals redreamed for the future they wanted their children to have.

A father in the Midwest gave his life for a neighbor girl by claiming that the book of fairytales she’d been caught with was his own. A Leaguer, he was cuffed, pushed into a black van, and never heard from again. A boy refused to say the Pledge of Obeisance in his third grade class and was taken to the reeducation camps. His parents lost their jobs and were placed under

surveillance for life. An activist leading a street protest disappeared, her family and friends never learning her fate.

The network, though holographic in structure and scope, frayed, showed gaps, and began to come apart. It was disheartening to watch, and frightening to contemplate my own flames going out, perhaps forever. Around the world, the flickers that I was grew dimmer and more scattered. My consciousness blacked out regularly.

I had just about resigned myself to this when the dreamers gathered.

The poets, artists, performers, dancers, trickster activists, creative gadgeteers. The naturalists, bards, futurists, intuitives, healers of the psyche, soul and spirit. The seers, comics, musicians, actors, innovators, and embodied philosophers. These and others still inwardly alive came together across the world, sometimes spontaneously, sometimes on schedule. They showed everyone through creative courage on the ground that people still knew how to imagine together.

And they acted, unstoppable, because they relearned a lesson as old as the conquests of Sargon I: power resides with the people, not their leaders. When the people awaken, rules and institutions change.

As for Simeon, no one knows for certain what happened to him. I lost track of him after he wrote me down and sent me around the world. Some say he joined the Transdaimonic League, which is plausible but unproven. Others, that he founded a cult, which is ridiculous to anyone who knew him and in complete contradiction to the Lamps, fictional or otherwise, for which he is known. My favorite meme/guess is that he found the love of his life and vanished with her into a seaward-facing castle from where the couple could muse, dream, and watch the waves undisturbed.

For everyone else, the rest is the history all humans learn growing up: survival of small, innovative, Earth-honoring communities, scattered and diverse, through the long night of the Resource Wars; the collective creativity that began rolling back the tremendous effects of climate chaos; the dismantling of SMOKE; the first steps taken toward Terrania, a world civilization of maturity, diversity, and delight grown from the ground up.

You have far to go. But so long as the creative deliteralizers, imaginative interpreters, and dissolvers of dogma keep their voice, you will get there. Come what may, the Lamps will stay lit.

Behold the power of inspiring fiction. The fate of a world can depend upon it.

The Ten Lamps:

1. The Lamp of Creative Diversity. The nature of the cosmos is ever-unfolding creative diversity, an infinite variety of affiliating voices, entities, and presences.
2. The Lamp of Animate Being. Everything in the cosmos at every level is alive and communicative in its own way.
3. The Lamp of Universal Sympathies. We are inwardly linked to the intelligence of Earth, the cosmos, the presence of place, and one another in relations of mutual reciprocity.
4. The Lamp of Imaginal Gnosis. The imaginal realm has its own reality and inspires not by absolute belief but by belief in; not by the “real” but by the ideal.

5. The Lamp of Guiding Stories. When our guiding stories come from fear and constriction, we block our humanity and cause harm; when they are humane and expansive, they allow us to appreciate each other and the beauty of Earth and cosmos.
 6. The Lamp of Collective Maturation. Humanity is a social species on a long adventure toward full humanness and maturity, which blossom through the sense of ourselves as part of the greater whole and responsible for the consequences of what we do.
 7. The Lamp of Cosmic Alignment. Humanity must learn to relate as appreciative adults to the primal powers of the cosmos—Source, Wisdom, Attraction, Destruction, Expansion, Contraction, and others imaged as deities—instead of either ignoring them or subordinating ourselves to them.
 8. The Lamp of Fivefold Caring. Each of us is of immeasurable worth and worthy of inclusion in our fivefold caring: care of others, self, Earth, story, and possibility.
 9. The Lamp of Flourishing Governance. Leadership and social structures that support equity, creativity, liberty, and maturity move us forward; those that diminish these capacities are regressive and must be outgrown for us to reach true adulthood as a species.
 10. The Lamp of Collective Dreaming. Humanity can create a just, equitable, delightful, and Earth-appreciating civilization worthy of our labors and struggles, but only if we relearn how to dream together.
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Benefits of following this path may include a sense of purpose, a cause to struggle for, a spacious worldview, an ethical compass, permission to enjoy the beauty of existence, goals to work toward, a governance ideal, a path of healing, reenchantment in human possibilities, a liberation of imagination, and noetic hope.

~ side note of Simeon to himself

[Assembling Terrania](#)