It was during my first visit to Santa Fe, on the drive in from Albuquerque that I first saw the stars in the landscape. It was as if all of Santa Fe were set in a pale blue concave dish ten miles across and there, sparkling in the midst of its innumerable adobe homes, glittered a thousand stars. It was as if, looking into the landscape of Santa Fe from a slight distance, you could see the entire galaxy reflected, as if, somehow, the stars had been here first and were still twinkling through the developed terrain and through the lives of its 60,000-plus inhabitants.

The Earth has many mysteries and the possibility that you can find special places around the globe where through some obscure miracle the galaxy is imprinted in the soft ethers of a landscape no longer seems strange to me. It’s true, I’ve seen the same pattern elsewhere, so like an acupuncturist recognizing an energy pattern in a human being, in a somewhat similar manner seeing stars in the landscape makes a lot more sense to me than it did years ago when friends and colleagues in England first introduced me to the mystery. I remember well how they explained the highly unusual idea to me.

We had all been students of meditation, had read some of the Western and Eastern esoteric teachings, had dipped into channeled material, and had pondered some of the archetypal questions of life. One of the paramount principles you come across when you look into almost any esoteric system, but especially Qabala, Hermeticism, and Gnosticism, is that the above is reflected in the below. This is the idea that the greater universe, the macrocosm, is expressed in the lesser universe, our world, the microcosm.

There is a famous axiom: As above, so below, which people usually understand to mean that if you comprehend the human being you’ll fathom the mysteries of the cosmos, too. Rudolf Steiner once put it this way: “cosmology equals organology.” He meant that the energies and intelligences of the stars contribute to the creation and life of all the organs, systems, and processes of our human body. If you want to understand the Sun, study your heart. After all, astrology has been implying as much for millennia, for how else could a planet or star influence a human being if there were not such an intimately organic connection between the two realms?

But I always felt something had been left out of this familiar Hermetic axiom. My English friends filled in the missing part. As above, so below, and in the middle, too. Or: Macrocosm equals the Microcosm and the Middlecosm, too. What is the middle? It’s Earth, Middle Earth, our bluewhite host planet in between humanity and the cosmos. The missing element in the equation is that the same galactic pattern is expressed in the organization of the planet itself. We could say: Cosmology equals planetology equals organology.

After all, James Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis had suggested that the planet is a self-regulating geophysiological organism with a kind of automatic intelligence. Others had since taken his materialist model into a more deific perception of the planet, seeing it as a self-aware, purposeful Gaia. The Chinese have always seen the landscape in terms of blue dragons and white tigers and have sited their pagodas with respect to a landscape’s energy configurations. Still others, like British Earth Mysteries doyen John Michell, have suggested for years that the Earth’s landscape is riddled with the remains of a vast energy network and that ancient megalithic engineering once sought to maximize this esoteric environment for human well-being. So when my friends took me to Glastonbury in Somerset, England, to see the famous landscape zodiac or what the local mystics called the “Temple of the Stars,” the dust was swept away from my eyes and I saw the stars shining in the landscape.
Sweeping the dust away from your eyes of course is the secret. What do I mean by dust? Our habits of perception, our theories of how the Earth got here and why, our sense of what is possible and what isn’t, our belief that we can make a difference. So I spent a lot of time dusting—a good ten years at least. At the time I was researching a book on the king Arthur legend and the possibilities of re-enacting the Grail Quest today as a legitimate spiritual path. I had a hunch the whole business had a lot to do with the landscape, with the mystical side of Glastonbury known as Avalon.

I was fortunate in having a chance to try it on for size, to put on the uniform of the Grail Knight and take a spin in the starry landscape. The Grail Knight was somebody, man or woman, who sought the Holy Grail, and in so doing, travelled widely across the landscape and had many strange and marvellous adventures. Once a year all the Knights assembled at Camalate, King Arthur’s headquarters, sat about the Round Table and talked shop. Living in Glastonbury for three years and having excellent teachers helped me see another side to this very old story. I saw how these men and women, in the course of seeking initiation into the Grail Mysteries, traversed the esoteric landscape. That is, they walked among the stars in the landscape and had inner experiences to do with the energies and intelligences of the stars of the galaxy—while they were still in their bodies, still on Earth. I also saw how there was a wonderful reciprocity at play.

There you are, a Grail Knight, seeking illumination and grace, and you call in at a hundred star-points in the secret landscape. You follow the star map and meditate at the sites. You extend your spirituality to include the landscape; you seek the Grail on behalf of the planet itself. You have inner adventures with implications for yourself and Earth alike. At the same time and by virtue of this very act of recognizing the hidden sacrality of the landscape, you are helping to divinize the terrain itself. That’s the two-edged meaning of the word geomancy: to figure out (to divine) the mysteries of Gaia and in the process of cognizing its esoteric side, to give it divinity (to divinize), which is our human responsibility. As spiritual beings, we are Gaia’s parents.

Anyway, if there are innumerable stars hidden in the landscape, mightn’t they need the breath of human spirituality to awaken them? I think so. It seems to me that the Grail Knight seeking enlightenment is also a kind of Grid Engineer, bestowing activation. The “grid” is a term people often use to describe the complex energy anatomy of the planet; an “engineer” is just a convenient analogy to describe a way of creatively interacting with this vast energy body. As above (that’s the galaxy), so below (that’s us), and in the middle, too (that’s the stars in the landscape).

But there is another factor. There are no Lone Rangers in this business. When I used the word “activation” a moment ago, I meant it in a special way. Take the analogy of a dimmer switch. You turn the knob slowly and incrementally fill the room with light; it’s not a simple on/off affair. When a Grail Knight, or a group of Grail Knights, are out in the landscape walking among the stars seeking illumination, they are in effect helping to turn the knob on the dimmer switch. But the switch won’t move unless there are two other hands on it at the same time.

To turn the dimmer switch of a landscape zodiac you need the “hands” of the angelic kingdom and the elemental kingdom, most particularly, the gnomes. In the medieval Grail stories, the Grail Knights often travelled in the company of a somewhat grouchy dwarf; he was a short, and short-tempered, fellow who knew his way around and was usually quite helpful. When you see the name “dwarf” (as in Rumpelstiltskin or Snow White & The Seven Dwarves) you have to read it as meaning “gnome.” Yes, there are gnomes in Santa Fe. As for angels—well, most people know about angels in the 1990s. I think it works this way: The angelic kingdom transmits the pure energies of the stars and of their own essence; this comes through the Grail Knight meditating in the landscape; and the gnomes take this energy, which to them is like a flaming torch, and light smaller brands and place them all over the landscape. Those are the three hands on the dimmer switch.
Another way of looking at this is to think of it in terms of architecture. You’re building a temple or cathedral, except it’s made of stars and invisible unless you remove the dust from your eyes. It is a zodiac temple, a sacred enclosure made of the seven classical planets, the twelve signs of the zodiac, and many dozens of other bright stars. Except it is a temple only in an analogous sense. It sounds strange but in a certain sense when you look up at the night sky and see the stars, which are only a handful of the billions that comprise a single galaxy, you are seeing an illusion. Or let’s say you are seeing an incomplete picture. You have to connect the dots to see what the pinpricks of light all add up to. Some people call the webwork of stars a hologram.

Say you have an original object like an apple, then you make a holographic picture of it. This doesn’t resemble an apple at all, but looks like the squiggles on a contour map, an “interference pattern.” It contains all the information of the apple but the light given off by the apple is scattered in such a way that it seems to lose its form. Then when you shine a laser light onto the hologram, you get a virtual reality see-through image of the apple again. In this analogy, the original apple is “God’s” perfect idea of the universe, creation, and reality; the interference pattern is the galaxy or stars in the landscape. Some mystical traditions contend that this perfect idea of existence took the form of the primordial cosmic Human, known variously as Anthropos, Adam Qadmon, or Phanès.

All the stars of the galaxy are parts of Adam Qadmon’s massively magnificent spiritual body. Except when you see the stars you forget the original image; you can’t see the Old Man for the stars. Then when you project coherent light (your human spirituality) through the starry hologram, you get a virtual image of this primal Human again. I think that’s what the Grail Quest is all about. To restore the original image in the context of the Earth. You might also call this figure in light the Edenic Adam “fallen” into matter; or perhaps the Holy Ghost caught in Time. Or, following the English mystical poet William Blake, call it Albion, whose name I whimsically decode as A Light Being In Our Neighborhood.

Albion is one of many possible names for this great mystery lying in our midst, made of stars. Perhaps you remember the story of Gulliver in Lilliput. An ordinary human anywhere else, in Lilliput he was a giant, so the fearful Lilliputians strapped him down on the landscape, pinning his arms and legs. He was so big he frightened them. It’s like that with Albion. When you see all the stars in a landscape zodiac at once, you might get a shocking glimpse of Albion, the giant of light lying in our midst.

In the Grail stories they called him the Rich Fisher King. He lived in the Grail Castle and was attended by Grail Maidens every day who brought the Holy Grail before him as a sacrament. Unfortunately it did him no good on account of his wounds. He had injured himself years ago and was basically an invalid; he was rich because he had the Grail, but he was wounded because he couldn’t partake of the Grail and remember his divine origin. And because of his condition, the landscape became a Wasteland. It is the Grail Knight’s job to heal him, to restore memory to the King and life to the land.

All of this is a wonderfully timeless allegory about our own human condition. It also gives us clues about how to approach the secret landscape. We all know that the land today is grieving, that it is in large measure wasted and spoiled, and that the Fisher King within each of us is similarly in pain. Illumination is literally within our reach yet we cannot manage it, and so, like Anfortas, the wounded Fisher King in Wagner’s Parsifal opera, we suffer like beggars amidst spiritual riches. The man of inordinate strength cannot lift even his own arm.

One of the most astonishing things my English mentors shared with me is the idea that working with the esoteric landscape, with the stars twinkling inside the land, is the key to revivifying both planetary ecology and human psychology. In one sublime gesture, you—a single person—can help heal the Fisher King and restore the Wasteland. How is this possible? The stars in the landscape underlie the health and well-being of both psyche and environment. It’s a kind of celestial star magic and you are the magician. The “magic wand,” if you will, is a tiny, brilliant pinprick of absolute light that twinkles at the center of every human being, young and old, good
and evil, Christian and Jew, believer and atheist—right there, two inches above your navel and the same distance inside.

It is a single Blazing Star that shines with adamant perdurance at the core of our being—a tiny, tiny pinpoint of brilliant light that opens the door to the starry landscape. In fact, in a mystical sense, this single star that each human being carries actually wrote or “mothered” the myriads of stars in all the galaxies. That’s why when you wield this simple pinpoint of light you position yourself at the first point in consciousness that precedes all of creation. You might think of this Blazing Star as the Pole Star or Polaris of the galaxy. With this star you’re able to reiterate all the steps by which the world was generated. And that’s how you can work with the stars in a landscape and help the esoteric temple rise up amidst our everyday life.

It sounds very peculiar, I know: stars in the landscape, pinpoints at our navel, Fisher Kings. Think of it as one of many possible analogies that can help orient you to a great mystery living in the landscape. The Grail stories are really archetypal and describe basic energy relationships regardless of culture. Here’s how my august friends first explained it to me: “The Earth was made in the human image. It is a designer planet created expressly to make higher consciousness possible while living in a human body. It is a mirror image of what a Human is. Look in the mirror, which is the stars in the landscape, and you will remember where you came from and why. Then you can help the planet remember, too.”

It took me a long while to understand what they meant by “designer planet.” Eventually I saw the wisdom of their ways. Think of it this way: The Earth is a big place. You’d have to walk about 25,000 miles to circumambulate the globe. If there were only one sacralized landscape, it would be hard for most people to get there. That’s why there are many locations where you can find the stars twinkling in the landscape, something short of 500 worldwide.

Like flowers, they’re all different sizes, ranging from 1/2 mile across to over 100 miles in diameter. The one in Santa Fe is 9.8 miles wide. Size isn’t important, because the contents are always the same: a miniaturized, holographic presence of the galaxy. And consider this: if the human being is made in the image of God’s perfect idea of the cosmos, and the planet is, too, then the planet can help you remember your celestial origin by constantly mirroring it. You just have to wipe the dust off the glass.

You might think of this worldwide system as akin to the human body. We have organs, bones, systems, processes, all arranged in an orderly interconnected fashion. Similarly, these 500 landscape zodiacs comprise a hierarchy of energy and interconnected relationship; they each have their lawful place in a complex energy system, a kind of global totem pole of zodiacal faces. The star map in Santa Fe has something to do with the planetary “head.”

If you think in terms of dimmer switches, only a handful of these star temples are meant to be “turned on” at any point in time. Still, in our time, too few have been illumined, although there are people—Grail Knights, if you like—out there in the “grid” working with the angelic and elemental kingdoms to slowly turn the lights up. Why bother? Because our “Mother” needs more consciousness so that She can reflect more pristinely our own divine origin so we might remember and be happy while we’re here.

As a zodiac starts to gradually shine from within a landscape, life takes on a different tenor. People have insights, the physical terrain gets recharged, innovations happen, culture flourishes. And things get stirred up. When the Light hits the shadows, all the shadowy things run amok, looking for cover. Things may seem weird for a time, even seem to take a nose dive for the worse.

The recent “crime wave” and gang conflict in Santa Fe is arguably an expression of this response. The same with Sarajevo, Jerusalem, and Baghdad, where there also are landscape zodiacs. You see the same reaction in homeopathic treatment: at first, the patient gets worse as all the symptoms return. But for the homeopath, this is the best sign that the remedy—which is a kind of spiritual light derived from the plant kingdom—is working. It stirs things up, precipitates
a healing crisis, and pushes the deep-set symptoms up to the surface, and out. Despite the momentary turbulence, healing is the ultimate outcome.

When Grail Knights are out in the “grid” using only their Blazing Stars as tools, their presence acts a bit like a homeopathic remedy. The work may shake things up, in themselves and in the community. It’s all energy and connectedness, remember, and some things take a while to percolate into the physical sphere and sometimes the effects are indirect and not easy to trace back to their “causes.” But the long term prognosis is very good: the stars are starting to shine from within Santa Fe. But don’t just take my word for it.

One of the elegancies of the once and future Grail Quest is that each Knight has to verify the reality of the Grail and esoteric landscape on their own. King Arthur was no guru; he was a mentor, as was Merlin and some of the other well-known legendary figures. This is a collegial business; everybody is self-employed. The paradox is that you have to prove it to yourself. The epistemology is self-serve. Seeing is believing, but, paradoxically again, believing is seeing. It helps to know that there might be a majestic star imprint in your landscape if you then want to prove to yourself that it’s true or false.

I mentioned the idea of “grid engineering.” There is a certain amount of engineering involved in this work when it comes to plotting out the approximate starfalls for a given landscape zodiac. Various disciplines such as geometry, astronomy, astrology, Qabala, mythology, Tarot, esoteric traditions, and mathematics all seem to be implicated. You find the stars packed into layers or Chinese boxes, starting with Canis Major, the great Dog whose throat is Sirius, and on to the exotic outer stars of the Southern Hemisphere such as Fornax, Columba, Puppis, and Ara.

You find it’s a complex nest of stars arranged in a fascinating hierarchy of generation and relationship. It’s not at all what you expected and you spend half your time thinking all the published star maps are wrong. Things just are not what they seem. If you are trying to illumine a landscape zodiac, you start in one direction, from the Great Dog on the downward path of incarnation. If you are trying to illumine yourself, you start in the opposite direction, at the Southern Hemisphere gateway and work your way carefully upwards on the path of redemption. Either way, you’re bound to meet the Dog at some point, either at the beginning or end of your adventures. Be nice to the Dog: it’s the temple guardian and initiator and your life is in its hands.

In case you’d like to experience Sirius, our galaxy’s brightest star and the Dog’s own, you will find it anywhere in the Plaza del Sol Shopping Center off St. Michael’s Drive. For the energies of Sagittarius, try St. John’s College campus, especially the hills behind the school. For Canopus, the galaxy’s second brightest star and the rudder for the great ship Argo Navis, visit Moon Mountain. If you want to check out Megrez, one of the seven stars of the Big Dipper in Ursa Major, and if you want to gain an insight on Saturn, visit the Plaza, skateboards not required. If it’s Aquarius you’d like to experience, spend a little reflective time at Fort Marcy Ballpark where all the streams come together. For Regulus, the heart of Leo, spend a few moments in the large open field just on the northwestern edge of Santa Fe Community College. If Pisces is your inclination, try the Cross of the Martyrs.

The worst that can happen is you’ll prove me wrong. The best is that you might be touched by the stars in the landscape of Santa Fe and in turn, you might reach out and touch them as well. Faith, after all, is believing something might be true until you can prove it to yourself that it is. In this City of Holy Faith, that’s an attitude that could cover a lot of ground, whether it’s about the nature of Divinity or the possibility that stars are shining under your feet as you walk through town. In any event, it presages a bright future.