

George Adamski died a decade and a half ago but he has not been forgotten, at least by those who believed him when he said he had befriended benevolent beings from other planets and learned cosmic philosophy from them. Serious ufologists almost universally rejected his claims as fraudulent, but the man nonetheless left his mark as the most talked-about and influential of all contactees. Dr. David Stuppel, a sociologist, reviews "one of the most peculiar episodes in modern social history."

The Man Who Talked with Venusians by David Stuppel

George Adamski may not have been the first person to claim contact with visitors from outer space, but he was certainly the first whose story attracted wide public attention. Foreign-born and with little formal education, Adamski at age sixty-one claimed that on November 20, 1952, he met and conversed with a man from Venus on the California desert near Desert Center, California. News of this incident touched off a storm and set into motion a series of events that would transform the flying-saucer movement. From 1952 until Adamski's death in April 1965 he occupied center stage in one of the most peculiar episodes in modern social history. Yet in the years since then no one has attempted a serious analysis of Adamski's claims and their significance.

The problem of sorting out what Adamski claimed from what he didn't claim is a complicated one. To begin with, his two major books were ghostwritten, the first

(*Flying Saucers Have Landed*) by Clara L. John, the second (*Inside the Space Ships*) by Charlotte Blodget. Furthermore, enthusiastic supporters made claims on his behalf that he may or may not have endorsed. In those instances where we can separate mythology from the "real Adamski" I so indicate; otherwise I treat the Adamski story as a naturally unfolding series of episodes.

For chronological and other purposes I have arranged the claims in four sets. You will note that these claims grow progressively more fantastic, moving from the merely unusual to the bizarre—a fact that will be significant in my later analysis.

Claim One: That before flying saucers became a nationwide sensation, he had "naked-eye" sightings of spaceships, that he made extensive efforts to photograph them, and that he was successful in obtaining a few reasonably good pictures.

On October 9, 1946, Adamski saw a gigantic spacecraft hovering above a mountain range south of Mount Palomar and then moving toward San Diego. During the most intense part of a spectacular meteor shower Adamski and his friends suddenly noticed a large black, motionless object similar to a giant dirigible. Adamski turned on the radio and learned that hundreds of people in the San Diego area had seen the same craft. Later, in the café where Adamski worked, he overheard six military men remark that the phenomenon was "not of this earth."

This experience encouraged Adamski to keep his eye open for similar phenomena. In August 1947, while seated alone on a yard swing, he saw strange objects in the sky and called upon four of his friends to witness the sight. Together they saw a parade of 184 spaceships flying in squadrons of thirty-two (which must have left one of the squadrons a bit short). The apparent leader of the squadron signaled the others to pass by one by one, as if in review. As the last one passed, it stopped for several seconds and shot out two beams of light, one south toward San Diego and another north toward Mount Palomar. Later Adamski learned that a group of businessmen had

seen the same aerial display, and still later two scientists on their way to the observatory at Mount Palomar visited Adamski and asked him what he had seen.

In a separate incident in 1949, two men from the Point Loma Navy Electronics Lab in San Diego, along with two other men from a "similar setup" in Pasadena, came to call. They asked Adamski if he would cooperate by trying to get photographs of these spaceships with the six- and fifteen-inch telescopes he owned. Flattered that the military had sought his help, Adamski readily agreed. He bought film and soon had two reasonably good photographs taken about the time a flying saucer was supposed to have landed in Mexico City. Then "Mr. Bloom" from the San Diego lab dropped by to visit and hinted that the whole story of the Mexican landing had not been told. Adamski turned his photos over to Bloom and never saw them again. Not long afterward two "government men" from Mexico told him that the Mexico City landing did occur but that it had been hushed up because the Mexican people are "too superstitious."

A few days later, on March 21, 1950, Adamski gave a lecture on flying saucers to a local civic organization. This led the *San Diego Union and Tribune* to inquire about Adamski's pictures. Adamski related his story about the photographs and how he had come to take them, but when the newspaper tried to get further information from the San Diego lab, personnel there denied they knew anything about the matter. So did military agencies the paper subsequently contacted. *The San Diego Tribune Sun* then published a long article about the dispute. George Adamski had become a minor celebrity—and the victim, he claimed, of a government cover-up.

Now more dedicated than ever, Adamski took hundreds of photographs during 1950 and 1951; only a handful of them were good enough to look authentic. In July 1951 he published an article, "I Photographed Space Ships," in *Fate*. The story brought requests for copies of the photographs and Adamski sold them at what he claimed were nominal prices. Adamski's audience was growing.

Claim Two: That he met a man from Venus on the desert near Desert Center, California, and collected certain documents that verified the reality of the encounter.

After hearing reports of spaceship landings in the nearby desert Adamski journeyed to the area on several occasions, hoping to see one and meet its occupants. Two couples who knew Adamski by reputation introduced themselves to him and asked to be taken along on his next trip. These people were George and Betty Williamson and Al and Betty Bailey. Williamson, a self-described anthropologist, referred to himself as "Dr." Williamson.

On November 20, 1952, Adamski, the Williamsons, the Baileys, Alice Wells (Adamski's housekeeper), and Lucy McGinnis (Adamski's secretary) went to the desert, where they spotted a large spacecraft. Adamski announced that he "knew" the spaceship wanted to contact him and asked to be driven down the road about a mile and dropped off. Lucy McGinnis and Al Bailey obliged, and soon the spaceship arrived. Adamski was able to take seven films with his Brownie camera before airplanes came and scared off the spaceship. There Adamski stood, alone with his camera, when he met a man from Venus.

Feeling a "great sense of tranquillity," he carefully observed the spaceman, who had shoulder-length blond hair, stood five feet, six inches, and weighed 138 pounds. Clothed in a one-piece spacesuit, he had a round "suntanned" face and a high forehead, slightly slanting gray-green eyes and high cheekbones.

The two strangers communicated first by hand signals and telepathy. Then Adamski taught the spaceman a little English, enough so that the being could say "boom boom!" to express his concern about atomic bombs. But "Orthon" turned out to be a pleasant fellow with "music in his voice" and a hearty laugh. Adamski and Orthon managed a short discussion on the nature of space travel, God, and the mission of the space people on earth. Adamski learned that all planets in our twelve-planet system are inhabited, that visitors have come from all planets in our system and some from other systems. He also learned that Orthon had once been an earthman. Orthon refused to

have his picture taken because he feared it might enable earth people to recognize and persecute him.

He did, however, borrow one of Adamski's films and promise to bring it back some day. When Adamski asked to take a ride on the spaceship, Orthon turned him down. Adamski accidentally got too close to the ship and received a strong shock in his arm. Orthon then left, leaving Adamski with a sore arm and a feeling of great loneliness.

But there were souvenirs. The soles of Orthon's boots left symbolic imprints in the sand. George Hunt Williamson made plaster of Paris casts of these symbols, and Alice Wells, an amateur artist, made sketches. Twenty-four days later, on December 13, 1952, Orthon returned with his spaceship, and this time Adamski snapped three good photos—including a famous one showing three condenser balls on the bottom of the craft. Then Orthon flew close by, dropped Adamski's film out the window, waved his good-bye, and flew away. When the film was processed it revealed more cryptic symbols and a picture of what might be a spaceship.

This time the films turned out well, and now as proof of the visits of the man from Venus, Adamski had (1) the casts and sketches of the footprints; (2) pictures of the spaceship; and (3) a sketch of Orthon that Alice Wells was able to make from her observation of the Venusian through binoculars.

After the desert encounter the Baileys and the Williamsons went to the *Phoenix Gazette*, which on November 24, 1952, published an account of the story including photographs of the footprint sketches.

Not long afterward Adamski offered his story and photographs to British occultist Desmond Leslie, who was having trouble finding a publisher for a book he had written about UFOs in history—a sort of occult *Chariots of the Gods?* Both Leslie and publisher Waveney Girvan were impressed with Adamski's material, which they tacked onto Leslie's manuscript and released, as *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, which proved to be a highly successful book.

Adamski, now a new champion of the American occult community, soon had company. Within a two-year

period at least a dozen other men and women published books describing their contacts with space people. Adamski for the most part encouraged the new contactees by accepting their stories. The result was the development of a mutually supportive community of contactees with Adamski occupying a leadership position.

Claim Three: That he had a series of casual visits with space people in mundane places like cafés and formal visits with them aboard flying saucers in outer space.

With the success of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* Adamski was in great demand as a public speaker. He went on several tours and appeared at conventions with other contactees. During this period he claimed more contacts with the space people, who took him on rides to outer space where he met a thousand-year-old master from Venus. His traveling companions included Ramu of Saturn, Fircon of Mars, and his old friend Orthon of Venus.

These wise spacemen taught him about the social organization of outer space. The planets are arranged like classrooms in a grade school, they said. Earth is a kindergarten and the other planets are further advanced; robots do the work while people dance, make music, and have fun.

Moral and immoral behavior has physical consequences. Evil, for instance, brings sickness, old age, crime, and war. The right-thinking inhabitants of other planets, because of their virtuous behavior, are free from social and physical problems. And contrary to the beliefs of earthlings, there are only four senses: sight, sound, taste, and smell, all guided by the cardinal faculty of feeling. When one becomes master of his senses he is able to control his faculty of feeling and can communicate by telepathy. Telepathy, which works like radio, sends out energy in all directions. Everything in the universe has the same language: minerals, plants, animals, people. When one masters telepathy he can communicate with all of nature. To do so one must control the ego and "blend" with cosmic consciousness.

The space people told Adamski that they have contacted the heads of all governments on earth but that these

officials have withheld the information, planning to release it at the proper time. On the sinister side Adamski learned of a "Silence Group" controlled by international bankers with headquarters in Switzerland; Adamski reported that this Silence Group conspired to keep him quiet by disrupting his lectures and by otherwise plotting against him.

Claim Four: That late in life Adamski had a series of experiences that indicated he was something more than an ordinary earth person.

Adamski's success produced faithful supporters and determined detractors; these two groups contributed to the growing body of folklore surrounding him. One story concerned the so-called Straith Letter Mystery, wherein Adamski produced a copy of a letter purportedly written by one R. E. Straith of the "Cultural Exchange Committee" of the United States Department of State. The letter commended Adamski for his work and unofficially conceded that persons high within the American government believed in him. At least two other persons within the flying-saucer subculture received similar letters.

Another story claimed that Adamski had had an audience with Pope John. In one version Adamski gave the pope a sealed package from the space people and the pope gave him a gold medallion in return. While at least three sources report the meeting-with-the-pope story it is not clear whether Adamski himself made such a claim.

A third tale comes from Alice Wells, who upon Adamski's death revealed that he was secretly a member of the Interplanetary Council and that in his afterlife, by special permission of the council, he has returned to earth.

Attacks on Adamski generally have focused on his photographs and his supposed encounter with Orthon. Astronomer Donald Menzel had pointed out that Adamski's photograph of the flying saucer with three balls below it looks suspiciously like a chicken brooder with infrared lights. Journalist Frank Edwards concluded that the picture showed the top of a canister type of vacuum cleaner.

Ray Palmer, an editor of various science-fiction and flying-saucer magazines, claimed that Adamski submitted

the Venusian story to him in 1944 with Jesus Christ as the Venusian. Veteran ufologist Paris Flammonde reported that Adamski published a science-fiction story in 1946 called *Frontiers of Space* and that this story anticipated his later claims in *Inside the Space Ships*. Similarly, Edwards reported that in 1949 Adamski submitted to the Library of Congress a book of fiction entitled *An Imaginary Trip to the Moon, Venus and Mars* and that this later became his contribution to *Flying Saucers Have Landed*.

James W. Moseley probably did the most damage when he featured an Adamski exposé in his magazine *Saucer News*. He wrote that Adamski's witnesses were his close friends and believers. Alice Wells, for instance, was a longtime Adamski devotee. "Doctor" George Williamson wasn't a Ph.D., Moseley disclosed. He also reported that Jerrald Baker, a former Air Force man who lived with Adamski through the period of November and December 1952, said he heard a tape recording in which the Adamski group discussed plans to stage the meeting with Orthon. Baker also claimed that Adamski took the famous pictures of the saucer with the three condenser balls on December 12 by himself and that there was evidence that Adamski photographed a model of a saucer.

The crowning piece of debunking came, however, from Adamski's close associate C. A. Honey. Honey has produced photocopies of lecture material Adamski had used in the 1930s when he presented himself as a teacher of Eastern religion and metaphysics. On these lecture sheets Adamski merely crossed out the words "The Royal Order of Tibet" and substituted "the space brothers." But according to Honey the worst offense was a plan Adamski hatched to bilk enthusiasts with a scheme in which he would advertise that the space brothers were looking for contacts. He would then approach the most sincere respondents for money to cover the special costs of training. Honey concluded that Adamski once had genuine contacts with spacemen but later became the tool of psychic forces that impersonate space people.

Publisher Gray Barker has suggested that Adamski's first experiences were genuine but that when followers

subsequently pressed him for more stories, he simply concocted them. Barker's theory is one of the very few that consider the effect of social processes on the belief system of contactees. More popular are psychologically oriented theories and those suggesting that the contactees have been purposely misled by outside forces. Chemical engineer Leon Davidson proposed the classic version of the latter when he argued that the Central Intelligence Agency was doing the hoaxing. More speculative versions of this theory suggest that the hoaxers are extraterrestrial, extra-dimensional, or even demonic in origin.

It seems to me that while the various exposés of Adamski may well be correct, to some extent they miss the point. With a few exceptions they assume that Adamski was an ordinary man who either lied or told the truth. Unfortunately the answer may not be all that simple, and I think we must therefore develop other standards for evaluation. I wish to make three general arguments: (1) that Adamski was a utopian and that his ideas are necessarily typical of utopian thought; (2) that Adamski's mode of consciousness produced orderly, if fantastic, realities and that he came to believe in those realities; and (3) that Adamski's ideas were a rehash of themes available in popular occult lore and that his followers, many already occultists, found his claims to be consistent with their stock of common-sense knowledge.

Let us examine these arguments one at a time.

Adamski the utopian: One of the striking characteristics of Adamski's work is its literary barrenness. Although he describes extraordinary events, the narratives have a lifeless quality about them. The reader of *Inside the Space Ships* enters a perfect world—the kind, he says, we can create here on earth if we behave ourselves.

But there are problems. Utopias have a mechanical rigidity and a life-denying mood that few would find bearable. The rationality of the utopia is in the system; individuals are passive performers who function by habit and ritual. Utopias are machines with an assemblage of human parts: scientists, technicians, administrators, soldiers. People follow mechanical discipline and often wear uniforms.

Adamski's portrait of the social organization of outer space shares these characteristics with the utopias of science-fiction stories and social planners. The form of a utopia is the same regardless of the intent of its creator.

The utopian, as in the case of Adamski, tends to be a relatively isolated man. As such he observes the world around him and in his utopia magnifies what he understands to be its significant elements. Adamski, like many other American utopians, created a democratic world free of religious and racial prejudice in which, through good works and evolution, the individual could rise to the top.

Adamski's mode of consciousness: Most casual readers dismiss Adamski's writings as foolishness. There is, however, every reason to suspect that he took his philosophy seriously and that he believed he was contributing something of great value. When one reads his works in their totality, one discovers an integrated cosmology. His was a fertile mind and yet a mind that demanded order. It appears that he confabulated—that is, he created realities and then came to believe them himself, working new ideas into a deductive system. By doing so he mystified and persuaded many.

Creative thought comes naturally to marginal men who like Adamski are in but not of society. By surrounding himself with disciples in a remote desert home, he had a personal community that served as a supportive primary group and that provided a buffer against the attacks of a skeptical outside world.

While some of his followers eventually repudiated him, Adamski himself never recanted. He was sixty-one years old when he met Orthon, an advanced age to experience the extraordinary attention he received, and he was well into his seventies when he died, still the object of great reverence, vilification, and controversy. Given these circumstances, it does not seem reasonable to apply ordinary rules of truth and falsity to his claims.

Adamski and the occult: Significantly, Adamski's story about meeting Orthon was appended—almost as if it were an afterthought—to a rambling review of UFOs in

history by English occultist Desmond Leslie. Among other things Leslie placed the first visit by Venusians to the earth at the year 18,617,841 B.C. Borrowing from the works of H. P. Blavatsky, Leslie explained that the Sanat Kumara (the reincarnation of Jesus Christ) and four associates, the Lords of the Flame, came to earth to help earthlings "evolve." Leslie also considered other ideas that have become staple items in the developing flying-saucer mythology: that space people make themselves visible and invisible by vibrating at different "octaves" of existence and that flying saucers are somehow related to pyramids and various wonders of nature.

Adamski, a lifelong student of the occult, held himself out to the public as a teacher and philosopher. With the phenomenal success of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* he found a ready audience in the American occult community, and he and his fellow contactees used local occult and metaphysical groups to promote their tours. Invariably the contactees wove familiar occult ideas into their colorful tales of adventure with the space people.

In sum, Adamski appears to have been a benign man immersed in an esoteric subculture. Because he lived with supporters in relative seclusion he was able to maintain his exotic ideas with impunity. Attacks only confirmed his beliefs. He was rewarded for his exotic claims and appeared to come to believe in the world he created. Compulsiveness and a lack of formal education facilitated his tendency to synthesize the improbable into his world view.

Many of his critics have remarked on his apparent sincerity. George Adamski had a vision of a better world, and that vision apparently became reality for him. If he had lived in a less insulated environment, he might not have been able to function as well as he did. But it's pointless to dismiss Adamski and his successors simply as lunatics or liars. That diverts us from an examination of the social processes and historical conditions that produced this modern variant of utopian thought.

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