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THE U.F.O. CONTACTEE BOOKS - AN ANALYSIS

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The U.F.O. contactee books have had unusual success considering their subject matter. Thousands and thousands of hardback and paperback copies have passed over supermarket counters, were picked off of drugstore bookracks and hurriedly selected from bookstore shelves. At the height of the interest in flying saucers they became listed among the most popular books ever sold. Unaffected by negative reviews they set new sales records for occult type books and forced the most prejudiced of reviewers to take notice. Writing in the Library Journal one critic advised librarians to avoid purchasing such books for their collections because,

no amount of rationalizing about future historical importance, balanced collections and public demand can justify their expenditure of tax dollars for books about flying saucers whose purpose seems to satisfy a jaded taste for the bizarre and the sensational. 1

Fourteen years ago there were thirty-two UFO books available for sale and half of these dealt with the contactee or abduction theme.<sup>2</sup> The most popular was The Interrupted Journey - Two Lost Hours Aboard A Flying Saucer by John G. Fuller. Important because it contained an introduction by a noted psychiatrist and because the experience itself aroused scientific interest it was viewed differently than its contemporaries. But it was still only able to obtain mixed reviews. "The skeptic is likely to remain skeptical," said Book Week.<sup>3</sup> The Virginia Kirkus Bulletin claimed that "viewed as fantasy or the overwhelming key to many a question...it is an intriguer."<sup>4</sup>

The media responded to the book with great vigor and Betty and Barney Hill became household names. The couple alleged that they were taken aboard a huge, circular shaped craft and examined by strange beings only to have the incident repressed from their mind. Through many sessions with a psychiatrist their experience was re-created and written

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1. David Flick, "Tripe for the Public," Library Journal Vol. 80 (Feb. 1, 1955), pp. 202-204.

2. Clarence Petersen, "Big Money in Swamp Gas," Book World Washington Post September 10, 1967, p. 33.

3. Book Week, February 12, 1967, p. 12.

4. Virginia Kirkus Bulletin Vol. 18, (December, 1966), p. 66.

about by author Fuller. Realistic in its tone the incident was recorded by the U.S. Air Force Project Blue Book. Public response was so great that Dial Press went through several hardback editions and Dell Publications went through several paperback editions. In 1977 it was released again by Berkeley-Medallion.<sup>5</sup>

Typical of the U.F.O. contactee phenomenon was the experience of Truman Bethurum, a California welder and truck driver. Bethurum stressed to his publisher, DeVorss and Company of Los Angeles, that his account was "non-fiction - a true story of factual adventure."<sup>6</sup> Entitled Aboard a Flying Saucer the book purports to be "an exact account" of his experience with an "Admiral Scow" or flying saucer. Bethurum's adventure began on July 28, 1952 when somewhere near Glendale, Nevada, he parked his truck to look for seashells but within a short time returned to his vehicle to snooze. He was awakened suddenly and in his own words describes the incident that followed:

I can only describe, as mumbling, as if by several people and entirely unintelligible to me. I raised up, startled to find my truck surrounded by about eight or ten small sized men. I would say that they were from four feet eight inches to around five feet tall...They were fully developed small men. The real difference which struck me so forcibly was that they all seemed to be wearing some sort of uniform-unfamiliar to me. <sup>7</sup>

Bethurum was taken aboard the saucer and introduced to the ship's captain Aura Rhanes, a beautiful woman who wore no makeup and who had smooth skin of olives and roses. Her eyes were brown and she had short dark hair.<sup>8</sup> She wore a red and black beret, and her skirt, he was quick to observe, "was of the most radiant material I have ever seen. ~~It~~ looked like wool and was set all round in small flat pleats."<sup>9</sup> The beautiful space woman spoke the king's English and wrote letters in Chinese and French. She explained to the intrigued truck driver that she had

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5. The Interrupted Journey is now available in the United Kingdom in a hardcover edition of 340 pages published by Souvenir Press. Author John Fuller's success as a writer in the United Kingdom may have had something to do with this.

6. Truman Bethurum, Aboard a Flying Saucer, (Los Angeles: DeVorss & Co. Publishers, 1952), bookjacket.

7. Ibid., p. 34.

8. Ibid., p. 39.

9. Ibid., p. 40.

landed on earth from the planet Clarion (somewhere on the other side of the moon) to learn about conditions on earth, to relax and to replenish the ship's oxygen tanks.<sup>10</sup>

In a letter later published in Life Magazine Bethurum said:

To Whom It May Concern:

If I am found dead it will be because my heart has stopped from the terrible excitement induced by seeing and going aboard a flying saucer. 11

Bethurum and the pretty space traveler would become good friends and after eleven visits she informed him "other planets are much too busy improving the welfare of their inhabitants to have time for even minor controversies." 12

Did anyone believe Bethurum? Enough did to buy thousands of copies of the hardback edition which sold for \$3.00 and went through four printings. By 1954 Bethurum's experiences with space travellers were not unique. He knew George Adamski, the most successful of the contactee writers and the first to achieve success and fame in publishing U.F.O. books. Bethurum stated,

But I was bubbling over with a new found happiness. It was great to know that I wasn't the only man in the world who had seen the space people. And this man, Professor Adamski, since he called himself a professor, was probably a highly educated man and knew what he was talking about. 13

George Adamski was the very first contactee writer to be recognized as having market potential by the major publishers. Polish born, he had a limited education and traveled considerably before he decided to settle in California. Locating in a small cabin under the shadow of Mount Palomar Observatory he preached something called the universal laws and became known as a mystic. Like Bethurum he would meet alien beings and receive philosophical messages, but with two major differences--Adamski rode in the spaceships and produced pictures of them. As his fame spread he became known as America's first ambassador to outer space.

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10. Ibid., p. 71

11. Ibid.,

12. Ibid.,

13. Ibid., pp. 185-186

Adamski proclaimed that his adventures began on November 20, 1952 at 12:30 p.m. in the middle of the Mojave Desert when he met a Venusian. He describes his visitor as follows:

There were only two outstanding differences that I noticed as I neared him.

1. His trousers were not unlike mine. They were very much like ski trousers and with a passing thought I wondered why he wore such an outfit out here in the desert.

2. His hair was long, reaching to his shoulders, and was blowing in the wind as I have seen a number of men who wore their hair that long. 14

The Venusian, who was five feet six inches tall, weighed 135 pounds and was twenty-eight years old, came to warn us about radioactive clouds from our atomic explosions. 15

Needless to say thousands believed Adamski and his book Flying Saucers Have Landed, which he co-authored with Desmond Leslie, did very well with sales surpassing 80,000 copies.<sup>16</sup> Such success prompted Adamski to write a second book entitled Inside the Space Ships in which Adamski again speaks to space visitors and travels first class throughout the galaxy. He supports his incredible stories with a number of photographs of cigar shaped craft and classic flying saucers with domes, one of which is claimed by several British critics, to be a chicken hatcher. There are also diagrams of the inside of Venusian and Saturnian mother ships with one showing launching ports (for the saucers), a laboratory, a lounge and a magnetic ray.<sup>17</sup> His descriptions of the ships are clear and leave the reader with no doubt about his experiences. "Once again it was beautifully illuminated by the same mysterious soft light without obvious source..." he claims and "the women were dressed in beautiful sheer gowns made of material that seemed to radiate an almost living quality." 18

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14. Desmond Leslie, George Adamski, The Flying Saucers Have Landed (London: British Book Center, 1952), p. 36.

15. Ibid.

16. The figure of 80,000 copies is based on this writer's research into book sales for the years 1952, 1953, 1954.

17. George Adamski, Inside the Space Ships (New York: Abelard Schuman, 1955), Illustration 10.

18. Ibid., p. 132.

Surely the power of the wondrous ships had to be kept secret from the earthlings because, as the head Venusian stated, "some of your people would quickly build ships for space traveling, mount guns upon them and go on a shooting spree in an attempt to conquer and take possession of other worlds."<sup>19</sup>

In 1955 our knowledge of the dark side of the moon was limited and Adamski was safe in describing the moon's terrain claiming "there is a beautiful strip or section around the center of the moon in which vegetation, trees and animals thrive, and in which people live in comfort."<sup>20</sup> The Saturnian ship captain told Adamski that there was a large laboratory just beyond the rim of the moon, out of sight of earth in the temperate and cooler section of that body."<sup>21</sup> Recent moon explorations, however, by the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. have not found anything even remotely close to the descriptions in Adamski's books.

With a thriving market Adamski and his publishers put out a third book in 1961 entitled Flying Saucers Farewell. That same year Paperback Library put out the same book in a paperback edition with the title The Flying Saucer Mystery. The book was a continuation of his other works but with more stress on the philosophical messages of the space people, who wanted earthlings to live a better life.<sup>22</sup>

Adamski's fame spread throughout the world, partly because of his books and their promotions and partly because of the interest in flying saucers in Europe and Asia. In 1962 he went on an international speaking tour which produced much media coverage. In one instance his comments caused a near riot among university students in Zurich, Switzerland.<sup>23</sup> In the Netherlands Queen Juliana and her husband Prince Bernhard "listened intently" to his words.<sup>24</sup> It was reported that 105,000 people attended his lectures and another 45 million heard him speak over radio and television.<sup>25</sup>

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19. Ibid., p. 90.

20. Ibid., p. 158.

21. Ibid., p. 159.

22. George Adamski, Behind the Flying Saucer Mystery (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1974), p.66.

23. Bob Grant, "George Adamski-First Ambassador to Outer Space," Real Magazine Vol. 17 (August, 1966), p.62.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

Others also gained fame with the same medium. Pyramid, then an emerging paperback house, took a gamble with sign painter Howard Menger of High Bridge, New Jersey, who declared that he took a space ride in 1956. From Outer Space to You, originally published by Gray Barker's Saucerian Books in Clarksburg, West Virginia, was billed as a message "from the unexplored cosmos to Earth." It purported that Menger had a message of importance "to all those with an open mind,"<sup>26</sup>

Menger meets his space people while walking through the woods near his New Jersey home and is then taken aboard a space ship where he is shown idyllic scenes of the planet Venus. Menger, though, claims he made his first contact in 1932, long before Adamski and Bethurum and all other contactees.<sup>27</sup>

Menger would have many meetings with his space friends who usually wore long hair and contacted them directly or through telepathy. One was dressed in a radiant, white type ski uniform (a la Adamski) "girdled about the waist with a white belt...over the uniform he wore a light blue flourescent-like cap fastened at the left shoulder with a gold pin."<sup>28</sup> Like his contemporaries Menger was able to produce clear photographs of Venusian reconnaissance craft" (flying saucers with domes) and several hazy shots of space people. The message of the space beings was clear and to the point:

They come in love and compassion for us,  
their brothers, to help us to help ourselves  
to reach a higher understanding of life and  
its meaning...The ones who have contacted me  
have come from Mars, Saturn, Venus and pro-  
bably Jupiter. 29

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26. Howard Menger, From Outer Space (original Title From Outer Space to You) (New York: Pyramid Books, 1974), pp. 62-64.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 154.

29. Ibid.

Menger's descriptions of Venus and the Moon, which are similar to those of Adamski, are at variance with the scientific evidence. The surface temperature of Venus, which varies from 650 to 1,300 degrees Fahrenheit, is high enough to roast the Venusians. And the various gases and pressures found on the planet make for a very inhospitable environment incapable of creating such beautiful people as described by Menger and Adamski.

Other Americans also claimed interesting experiences with space people. Albert K. Bender of Bridgeport, Connecticut explained his adventures in Flying Saucers and the Three Men published by Gray Barker's Saucerian Books in 1962. His most important allegation was that the extraterrestrials forced him to dissolve his International Flying Saucer Bureau.<sup>30</sup>

Each new book had its own twist. Calvin Girvin, for example, says he was inducted into the army in 1944, and after being wounded, had an experience in which a Venusian incarnated into his body and healed his wounds.<sup>31</sup> He later became an agent for friendly extraterrestrials and took rides in a flying saucer and a Venusian mother ship.

Many of the contactees came from California, an area already known for cultism and fads. Adamski and Bethurum were California residents when they had their experiences, as were Daniel Fry and George Van Tassell, who also had a small impact on the book market in their day. Fry's The White Sands Incident was published by a small Kentucky printer in 1966 and contained an account which occurred on July 4, 1950, in which he was taken aboard a remote controlled saucer and flown from the White Sands missile range to New Mexico to New York City and back in thirty minutes.<sup>32</sup> He also claims to have spoken with space beings in a huge base ship some 900 miles above the earth's surface. His book was very successful and in a letter to a contemporary author said,

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30. Albert K. Bender, Flying Saucers and the Three Men (Clarksburg, W.V.: Saucerian Books, 1962), bookjacket.

31. Calvin Girvin, The Night Has A Thousand Saucers (El Monte, Calif.: Understanding Publishing Co., 1958), bookjacket, pp. 1-3.

32. Daniel Fry, The White Sands Incident (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing, 1954), bookjacket, pp. 1-4

I have prepared a text concerning the purpose of our extra-terrestrial friends on earth, what they hope to accomplish and how. The title is A-lan's Message to the People of Earth. The publisher says that it will be available in about a week and the price will be about one dollar. 33

The list of contactees is long, especially during the fifties and early sixties. De Vorss & Company of Los Angeles published several books on the subject including those of Bethurum and Van Tassell. Gray Barker's Saucerian Press in West Virginia, though, was probably the most productive and successful of the small publishers dealing with contactee and related themes. His Chasing the Flying Saucers and Gray Barker's Book of Saucers are important for their discussions of "men in black," flying saucer crews and the activity of UFO researchers. Religious oriented contactees like Dr. Frank Stranges printed their own works and cultivated new markets.<sup>34</sup> The major publishers, though kept pace with the demand and continually explored other areas of the U.F.O. enigma for publication.

The contactee-abduction theme also proved popular in Europe where a number of writers had published accounts of their experiences with space beings. Typical was Cedric Allingham's Flying Saucer From Mars, a 1955 British Book Centre publication. Allingham, an accomplished writer and traveller, purported to have observed a flying saucer land in northern Scotland making contact with its human occupant. The circumstances of Allingham's experience parallel the experiences of many American contactees especially those of Adamski and Menger. Again there was little or no evidence to support Allingham's claims and his photographs were controversial. Reynolds News, an English newspaper, tried through innuendo to suggest fraud by comparing the photographs with spinning tops.<sup>35</sup> Another critic asked his readers to,

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33. Israel Norkin, Saucer Diary (New York: Pageant Press, 1957), p. 28

34. Frank Stranges claims he was told of a visit to earth by Valiant Thor from Venus.

35. Reynolds News October 24, 1954, p.4.



Make an extensive search for corroboration. I hope that Mr. James Duncan (an alleged witness) will eventually be found...if Adamski and Allingham are telling lies, then I want to look deeply and carefully into their possible motives. 36

European publishers were quick to capitalize on South American contactees for the American and European markets. In 1959 Neville Spearman published the highly successful My Contact with Flying Saucers by Dino Kraspedon, a Brazilian who had the work serialized first in the magazine Flying Saucer Review. The book had outstanding success going through six hardback and two paperback editions.<sup>37</sup> Kraspedon went further than Adamski, Fry or Bethurum in describing the forces that U.F.O.s use to navigate in Earth's atmosphere and in interplanetary travel.<sup>38</sup> Again the message of the space beings is apparent,

We came here for the purposes of study but also to make a desperate appeal to man to avoid the catastrophe and to live in peace. The Earth is not the center of the planetary system, as was previously believed, but the center of evil..<sup>39</sup>

Why were the major publishers so successful for three decades with these books? And what factors in society contributed to the demand for such books? The media played an important role in spreading information about contactees continually maintaining a public interest in the subject. Researchers have recently found that media bring the occult explanations for various phenomena so obtrusively to our attention that the public really turns to these explanations.<sup>40</sup> Reasoning deficiencies in the masses of the population are also important factors. In another recent study it was found that the "masses stick to beliefs, fail to seek alternative explanations and ignore evidence that contradicts their convictions."<sup>41</sup>

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36. Waveney Girvan, Flying Saucers and Common Sense (New York: Citadel Press, 1955), p. 154.

37. Dino Kraspedon, My Contact With Flying Saucers (London: Neville Spearman, 1973), copyright page.

38. Ibid., p. 57.

39. Ibid.

40. Marilyn Macholowitz, "Psychologists Speculate as Occult Beliefs Persist," The New York Times May 19, 1981, p. 63.

41. Ibid.

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The decline of modern religion must also be considered as a factor in the contactee phenomenon. The failure of the churches to serve the needs of modern society has become apparent when one examines church attendance. "This generation is seeking to translate faith into fulfillment, and to bring religion into the harsh realities of the hour," reports one study.<sup>42</sup> So where do the disillusioned look? To the space people of course. Students of religious and spiritual groups in America have known that,

The wise ones come as American Indians, spirit doctors, departed relatives or from a futuristic technology. Both types of groups employ the same manner of communication: vision and marvellous journeys, trance speaking and writing, sesame circles and telepathy. The close interaction between spiritualism and U.F.O. cults is not surprising, for one finds there is much exchange of persons between them. 43

But something else also exists in these contactee accounts. And that something, as shown by recent research, indicates that some of the encounters may actually have occurred. The ufologist Dr. R. Leo Sprinkle, of the University of Wyoming, accepts the claims of modern UFO abductees as legitimate.<sup>44</sup> He is not sure, though, if the abductions or contacts are real or out of body experiences.<sup>45</sup> He is supported in his findings by the eminent psychologist W.C. McCall of Anaheim, California. McCall studied thirty-five subjects to determine the veracity of their contactee and abduction claims and found that "the emotions that many of them showed seemed to lend credence to the story that they were telling."<sup>46</sup> Research by psychiatrists and experts in psychic phenomena have shown a relationship of psychic ability in contactees to their purported experience.

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42. George Gallup, David Polling, The Search for America's Faith (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 21.

43. Robert Ellwood, Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 131.

44. "UFO Encounters Ring True, But Not Real," Daily Freeman August 29, 1978, p. 1.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

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An intense study of contactee accounts of the fifties and seventies should prove very valuable. Such current and well known cases involving Travis Walton, Betty Andreasson and Stella Lansing are different in their facts than the cases of the fifties. Questions should be raised about the early cases of Adamski, Bethurum, Menger and Fry. Were there deficiencies in the gathering of facts and in interpreting the evidence? Were trained scholars involved in the evaluation of early contactee cases? To what degree were the early contactee psychic? These questions are vital in viewing the early contactee cases. Thus the books assume a new importance since, in many cases, they are the only record of what really happened. The eminent psychiatrist Berthold Eric Schwarz is correct when he says,

Conjecture should always be encouraged, no matter how seemingly way-out, as long as it is always anchored in solid facts and the interface between facts and conjecture can always be discerned...If some popular U.F.O. accounts contain but a germ of truth, they must be sought out, scrutinized and critically studied, since even if a fraction of some of the bizarre sensational claims were ever substantiated, the impact could be enormous, the profits from the knowledge undreamed of. 47

We cannot, therefore, classify the contactee books with fiction. They are important evidence of a phase of U.F.O. behavior and must be re-read, re-examined and re-interpreted in light of current scholarship.

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47. Berthold Eric Schwarz, "Saucers, PSI and Psychiatry," MUFON UFO Proceedings, June 22, 1974 (Stover, Missouri: Morgan Printing Company, 1974), p. 86.