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SAMUEL EATON THOMPSON CONTACT CLAIM

What is surely the most outlandish story in early UFO history is also one of the most obscure. At the time it supposedly occurred, a brief, 11-paragraph account appeared in a local newspaper (*Centralia Daily Chronicle*, April 1, 1950). A full report did not see print until over 30 years later (Clark, 1981).

The central figure in the story was Samuel Eaton Thompson of Centralia, Washington. Thompson, a poorly educated, retired railroad man in his 70s, related that on March 28, 1950, as he was on his way home from a visit with relatives in Markham, Washington, he drove through a wooded area between Morton and Mineral and decided to stop and take a break. He backed his car along an old logging trail, got out, and followed the trail on foot. Soon he came upon a large globe-shaped craft hovering just above a clearing. "It appeared to be made of a glowing, sun-colored substance similar to plastic," he told a reporter, "and was shaped like two saucers fused together. I judged it was about 80 feet horizontally and 32 feet vertically." Naked children were playing on steps that led from an open door on the side of the craft. They were "about the size of the average child, only they had finer features," Thompson told Kenneth Arnold, who interviewed him a few days later. "They were just beautiful." They had dark tans and lovely dark blond hair which came all the way to their waists.

Thompson felt "so excited I didn't know what to do." He approached the ship and when he got to within 50 feet, he began to feel heat emanating from it. Later Thompson would learn that this heat not only was used in the propulsion of the craft but also kept its occupants alive. The heat felt like rays from the sun, which accounted for the children's tanned skins, Thompson thought.

At this point adults—nude, tan, attractive men and women—came to the door and watched him, apparently frightened. When he assured them he meant no harm, they invited him into the ship, where Thompson would spend most of the next 40 hours. They told him to take off his shoes and socks before entering.

With the Venusians. The people were from Venus. There were, Thompson reported subsequently, "10 men and 10 women" and "25 children between the ages of six and 15 years." Speaking an "uneducated" kind of English, they turned out to be oddly ignorant, yet happy, cheerful, and gentle. "Their idea's not to destroy people," Thompson told Arnold and his wife Doris. "It's to make good will among people." Yet earthly aircraft had shot down their spaceships and in other ways behaved in an unfriendly fashion. Earth people's problems stem from the fact that they are born under different planet signs, whereas all Venusians are born under the sign of Venus. The peace-loving people who live on the other worlds in the solar system are also born under the sign of the planet they inhabit. But Mars is a bad sign, and the Martians are even meaner than earth people. The Venusians are "more afraid to land there than any other planet."

Thompson himself was born under the sign of Venus, a fact the Venusians recognized "the minute I walked up to that ship." If he lived a good enough life, he would be reincarnated as a Venusian. All persons who fulfill their "mission" return to the planet of their sign when they die.

According to Thompson, the Venusians enjoy long lives because they have good eating habits, eschewing meat for grits, herbs, artichokes, apples, and nuts—plants that grow on their home planet as well as on earth. While aboard the spaceship, he ate the food, which tasted "just great" and was never cooked. Because of their exemplary dietary habits Venusians are never ill; they die only of old age.

To Thompson the Venusians seemed like animals, at least in the sense that everything they do is instinctual. They know remarkably little, even about themselves. They do not know who built their ships (which serve as their dwelling places even when they are home on Venus) and have only a vague idea of how they are powered. Each ship has four sets of controls which consist of little more than levers to make the craft ascend, descend, accelerate, or decelerate. They are so simple that anybody can operate them.

Devoid of curiosity, the Venusians are never led to do anything wrong. They have no sense of time; in fact, the whole concept of time is foreign. Yet, according

to Thompson, "They're really smarter than we think they are. They've got a gift that is so much greater than ours that there is no comparison."

They have been coming to the earth for many years, but they had never contacted anyone before Thompson. Long ago they and the people of the earth had been the same, sharing "the first religion ever known" and speaking the same language. But corruption destroyed the moral fiber of earth people, and eventually a curse was cast on the world. Since then Venusians and other space people have come here to do good. They are not physically sent here; they are reincarnated. Apparently all human beings lived lives on other planets before they were exiled to the earth. The space people do not walk among us physically because our impure environment would make them sick or perhaps kill them.

The Venusians told Thompson they hoped to contact other earth people one at a time. Through this slow process they eventually will establish peace. Their efforts will culminate in Christ's return in A.D. 10,000.

Thompson said the spaceship (and "spaceship" was the word the Venusians called their craft) had only one door, although there were a number of rooms outside. These rooms, most of them brightly illuminated as if by sunlight, were square in shape. Those in the lower part of the craft were transparent all around the ship, enabling the viewer to see in any direction.

He slept overnight on one of the seats in the spaceship's "bedroom." The next morning, he claimed, "I asked them if I could go home and get my camera, and they didn't know what I meant. I said I'd be back, and they asked me if I was bringing anybody else along with me. I said, 'Do you care?' They didn't want me to bring anybody. They were afraid somebody would breathe on them or something and try to destroy them."

Thompson went home and returned alone with his camera. Trying to photograph the Venusians and their ship, however, was "just like trying to take a picture of the sun. It has a glow to it. That film was just blank. I wanted to get some of them right onto the ground to take some pictures of them, but they wouldn't come out."

He and the Venusians parted company on March 30,

a Thursday, two days after he had first seen their ship in the clearing. The Venusians told him he could contact them any time he wanted, but he had to keep certain information to himself. "If I'd tell everything I knew," he remarked to the Arnolds, "I never would get to see the ship again. I'd be watched every minute."

Thompson in retrospect. Because the story was so little known in its time, its impact on subsequent flying-saucer lore was nonexistent. Two and a half years later **George Adamski**, who seems never to have heard of Thompson (at least there is no mention of him in any of his voluminous writings), would claim contacts with peace-loving, blond, long-haired Venusians. Like Thompson's, Adamski's space friends allegedly told him there are 12 inhabited planets in the solar system, that the extraterrestrials eat "natural" foods, and that they do not get sick. But the differences were greater than the similarities. Adamski's Venusians wear clothes, speak with intelligence and grace, are technologically sophisticated, live among us, have contacted numerous human beings, communicate telepathically, and must "watch and control their thoughts" in order to resist temptation. Moreover, Adamski always spoke well of Martians (Adamski, 1955).

Whereas Adamski was often accused of fraud and sometimes even caught at it, Thompson's sincerity and lack of imagination seemed evident to the Arnolds (Arnold, 1980); nonetheless they had a hard time believing in the literal occurrence of the bizarre and unlikely events Thompson described. Perhaps, Kenneth Arnold speculated, he had had some kind of "psychic" experience (Chenowith, 1956).

The story most resembles one that Thompson could not have known even if he had been an avid UFO enthusiast—as he was not, according to Arnold, who visited his home and found no material suggesting any such interest (*ibid*). The episode, which supposedly took place on April 16, 1897, during a wave of mysterious **airship sightings**, did not enter the UFO literature until the early 1970s, after the original account (published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for April 19, 1897) was rediscovered. A St. Louis man named W. H. Hopkins, while traveling in the Springfield, Missouri, area, allegedly encountered two beau-

tiful nude Martians, a handsome man and a beautiful woman, both with long hair. Though they could not speak English, Hopkins discerned, from the puzzlement with which they regarded his watch, that they did not understand time. Perhaps because they came from a colder planet more distant from the sun than Venus, the Martians were fanning themselves as if overheated, while Thompson's friends could not tolerate the earth's cool early-spring temperatures.

The first complete account of the Thompson story appeared in the January 1981 issue of *Fate*, after Arnold made available to the magazine a tape of his interview with Thompson. In the article Jerome Clark, at the time *Fate's* associate editor, theorized that the incident was a visionary experience, in which Thompson drew on elements of popular occult lore and the biblical tale of Adam and Eve and from them fashioned a powerful dream of a "timeless paradisaic realm without war, conflict, disease, or misery." The result was a UFO-age version of the "eternal tale of what we might have been had we not given ourselves to evil and forever lost our innocence."

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SANDERSON, IVAN TERENCE (1911-1973)

Ivan T. Sanderson was born on January 30, 1911, in Edinburgh, Scotland, the son of whiskey manufacturer Arthur Buchanan Sanderson, who founded a game preserve in Kenya, where in 1924 he was killed by a charging rhinoceros. Interested in animals from an early age, by the time he was a teenager Ivan Sanderson

was making regular collecting trips to Europe and North Africa. He attended Eton College from 1924 to 1927 and received M.A.s, with honors, in zoology, botany, and geology from Cambridge University. Throughout the 1930s Sanderson traveled all over the world on scientific expeditions and wrote books such as *Animal Treasure* (1937) and *Animals Nobody Knows* (1938). From 1940 to 1941 he worked for British Naval Intelligence, and after the war he served the British government as a press and information analyst stationed in New York City. He became a permanent American resident in 1947 but retained his British citizenship for the rest of his life.

Sanderson became a fixture on popular television shows, where he presented specimens of exotic animals. He wrote more books, including the popular *Living Mammals of the World* (1955), and in 1959 made a 60,000-mile trip around the North American continent to study its ecology. From 1961 to 1965 he was a trade and science editor for Chilton Books.

Besides his more conventional interests, he was fascinated by strange phenomena such as those chronicled by anomaly-collector **Charles Fort**, whom he once heard lecture. He was an early pioneer of cryptozoology, the study of unknown animals. In the January 3, 1948, issue of *Saturday Evening Post* he proposed the startling hypothesis that "There Could Be Dinosaurs" still living in Africa; he was certain he and a companion had observed one while on a British Museum expedition in West Cameroon. His cryptozoological works include *Abominable Snowmen: Legend Come to Life* (1961) and *Things* (1967).

In September 1952 a press-wire service sent him to West Virginia to investigate a bizarre UFO-landing report involving a creature dubbed the **Flatwoods monster**. Sanderson subsequently became vice-president of **Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York**. He contributed a series of articles on UFOs to the science-fiction magazine *Fantastic Universe* between 1957 and 1959.

In his first book on the subject, *Uninvited Visitors* (1967), he argued that UFOs could be a number of different things, for example living creatures, or **space animals**. (He once wrote, "UFOs are probably, not just possibly, as varied if not much more diverse in origin than, for instance, all the loose and indepen-

dent objects that might be garnered from the whole Atlantic Ocean—ranging from amoeba and fish to pebbles and submarines” [Sanderson, 1958].) In *Invisible Residents* (1970) Sanderson surveyed a range of maritime mysteries, ranging from UFO sightings above, on, or beneath bodies of water, disappearances of planes and ships, and other anomalies, and argued that “OINTS” (Other Intelligences) live under the ocean. “I contend,” he wrote, “that if we will only stick to being logical ... there is no reason (a) why there could not be an extremely advanced ‘civilization’ under water, (b) why it *might* not be up to twice as old as ours, (c) why it should not have developed what we call space flight, and (d) why it should not be so far in advance of us technically that we would never have even noticed it until *we* started to develop a few really sensitive gadgets.”

In 1965 Sanderson founded the Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained, headquartered at his rural residence in New Jersey. He edited its quarterly (and still-published) magazine *Pursuit*, which dealt with ufological, cryptozoological, and other anomalous matters. He died of cancer on February 19, 1973.

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SAUCER NEWS

Saucer News was the liveliest UFO magazine of its time and probably of all time. Certainly there was nothing like it then, and there has been nothing like it since.

It entered the world as *Nexus*, a monthly, in July 1954 under the editorship of **James W. Moseley**, a brash young man of wide-ranging enthusiasms, not the least of them South American archaeology. But Moseley, a New Jersey resident, was most famous, or notorious, for an iconoclastic temperament and an impatience with any humbug but his own. His most lasting contribution to serious UFO study, seldom a major concern of Moseley’s, was his devastating exposé of the early contact claims of **George Adamski** in the January 1955 issue of *Nexus*. His meticulously documented charges have never been seriously challenged. In 1957 the *Nexus* article, along with two other pieces by Irma Baker and Lonzo Dove, was reprinted in the famous “Adamski Expose Issue” of *Saucer News*, the name by which *Nexus* became known starting with the June 1955 issue. At that time the magazine became a bimonthly; in 1959 it was changed to a quarterly.

Saucer News was ostensibly the organ of an organization called the Saucer and Unexplained Celestial Events Research Society (SAUCERS), but SAUCERS existed only on paper, specifically on the cover of the magazine and on Moseley’s stationery. “Since we didn’t do much research and never formed an active society,” Moseley says, “the organization did not achieve a whole lot of fame. It still exists—the *oldest* such organization in the USA!” (Moseley, 1990). In any case, *Saucer News* made an indelible mark not as a journal of sober research and analysis (though occasional articles in this vein appeared) but as an often hilarious chronicle of the emerging flying-saucer movement. Scarcely a feud between UFO personalities major and minor escaped *Saucer News*’ attention, and when one did not exist, Moseley invented one. He and fellow saucer publisher **Gray Barker**, in reality Moseley’s best friend, pretended to be bitter enemies and frequently denounced or “exposed”