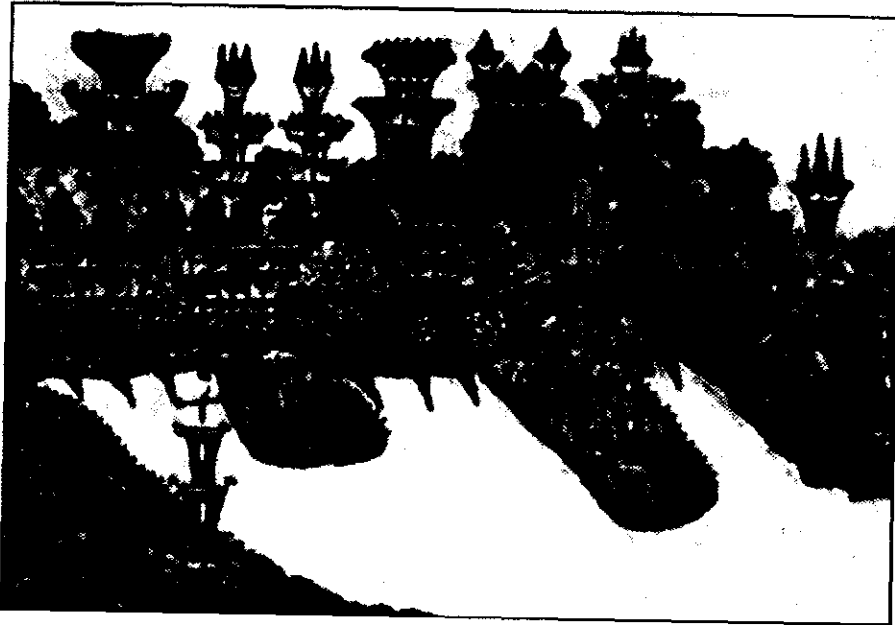


# Psychic Martians



Martian landscape as painted by "Hélène Smith."

by Jerome Clark

The word "contactee" brings to mind those individuals who appeared in the era of UFOs, from 1947 to the present. Contactees first came into prominence in the early 1950s, when individuals from around the world, most notoriously in Southern California, reported that friendly space people were delivering messages to them via interplanetary telepathy or face-to-face encounter. Anyone who knows the history of 20th-century occult culture knows the names George Van Tassel, George Adamski,

Howard Menger, and others who defined the contactee movement in its formative years. What is less known is that before there was widespread speculation about visitors from other planets, there were communications, or at least purported communications, from extraterrestrials.

## **Spiritualist Space Travel**

In the 19th and 20th centuries, astronomers and biologists debated the possible existence of Martians. This controversy continued until around 1960, when

growing scientific knowledge snuffed out any remaining hope for intelligent life on that cold and inhospitable world. All along, however, a number of individuals firmly insisted that the question was settled: there were Martians. They knew because they had communicated with them. Some went further: they had actually met them.

Most such claims from the 1800s were associated with the Spiritualist craze that swent the world in those years, and the contacts were effected through mediumship or astral travel.

Among the 19th-century American Spiritualists who reported Martian visions were father and son William and Sherman Denton. The elder Denton (1823-83), a Boston-based geologist, believed he had been blessed with the gift of psychometry, which enabled him to discern the nature and history of objects he either held in his hand or, when that was impossible, focused his concentration upon. The younger Denton believed he had the same paranormal talent. In the latter 1860s the Dentons looked to neighboring planets Mars and Venus as landscapes for psychic exploration.

Eventually, Sherman journeyed to Mars in his astral or spirit body. He found that it harbored a thriving population of humanlike inhabitants with a technology based on aluminum. "They soar above traffic on their individual fly-cycles," he reported. "They seem particularly fond of air travel. As many as 30 people occupy some of the large flying conveyances." This may be the first printed reference to Martian fly-

ing machines, though Sherman did not assert that they were traveling to earth.

## **Hélène Smith**

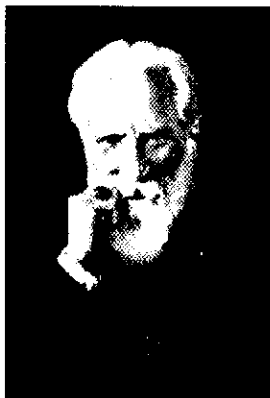
The most famous case of interaction with Martians concerned an amateur medium named Catherine Elise Müller (1861-1929), who was studied by the University of Geneva psychologist Théodore Flournoy. Flournoy recorded the episode in a classic work of anomalous psychology published in English as From India to the Planet Mars (1899).

Assigned the pseudonym "Hélène Smith" in the book, Müller grew up in a mystically inclined family and herself had strange experiences. Eventually, as the principal figure in a Spiritualist circle, she channeled messages first from prominent dead persons before graduating to more fully formed, dramatic visions of the Martian landscape. Müller often found herself on the planet itself.

Mars became so vivid to Müller that, as Flournoy observed, she appeared in some sense to be living her Martian life each moment of her day, switching easily, in various states of consciousness, from earth-bound consensus reality to her imaginative one on another world. In today's clinical language, she possessed a fantasy-prone personality.

Müller befriended Martians and even produced over time what purported to be a Martian language. In Flournoy's words, it was "an infantile travesty of French."

American psychical researcher James H. Hyslop investigated a case in 1895 in which



C. W. Leadbeater.

a clergyman's wife, one Mrs. Smead, kept a record of messages from her three deceased children and her brother-in-law. One of the children, Maude, told her that some spirits stay on earth, while others are dispatched to other worlds. Soon thereafter, Mrs. Smead learned from another of the children that Maude and her uncle now resided on Mars, from which the little girl subsequently communicated. She provided a map which showed Martian canals, at the time the focus of a widespread belief owing to the (subsequently discredited) observations of Arizona-based astronomer Percival Lowell (1855–1916) and his supporters.

### A Theosophist on Mars

Writing in 1959, Nandor Fodor, a psychoanalyst interested in psychic phenomena, remarked, "Since Emanuel Swedenborg...at least a dozen well-known mediums have been involved with the planet Mars." One of them, the British cler-

gyman and Theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater (1847–1934), reported visiting the planet in an astral state on several occasions.

Leadbeater's Martian surface borrows generally from Prof. Lowell's theories, with great canals (built by previous colonists from the earth's moon) that support vegetation along their banks. The dwindling civilized population lives along the equator, where the daily temperature averages 70 degrees Fahrenheit. These beings resemble earthlings, but are shorter, barely reaching five feet in height, and have broader chests to encase larger lungs, since the air is thinner. Scattered bands of "savages" live elsewhere, in less hospitable regions of the planet.

Most educated Martians, wrote Leadbeater, "have yellow hair and blue or violet eyes, somewhat Norwegian in appearance." They dress colorfully and have a particular fondness for flower gardens. Mechanical devices and trained animals do most of the work, allowing Martians to live long, disease-free lives of leisure under an autocratic monarchy and a communistic social order. Sexual infidelity is assumed, and the state raises the children who are its by-product. Martians, or the bulk of them, adhere to a strictly materialist philosophy.

The rigid cultural and intellectual orthodoxy that dominates most of the populace is challenged by a "secret brotherhood" that formed several centuries ago and is now widespread. "Some at least of

the members... have learnt how to cross without great difficulty the space which separates us from Mars," Leadbeater wrote, "and have therefore at various times tried to manifest themselves through mediums at spiritualist séances, or have been able, by the methods which they have learnt, to impress their ideas upon poets and novelists."

### Travels with Oomaruru

Another notable Martian communicant, Hugh Mansfield Robinson, brought old-fashioned mediumship into the age of electronic communications. A lawyer who lived in a London suburb, he had a metaphysical bent which led him to an immersion in Eastern religion and Christian mysticism. Out of that background he was directed to Martians, whom he first contacted in dramatic fashion one night in 1918. His son had just asked him how Martians were able to signal the earth (presumably popular lore on that subject spurred the question) when Robinson felt a presence near him. The presence of a Martian woman whom Robinson soon came to know as Oomaruru (Martian for "loved one"; spelled Umaruru in some accounts), said, "Come with me. I will show you."

In an interview with Fodor a decade later, Robinson said, "I caught hold of my son's hand to remain earthbound. With my other hand, which was now a hand of my phantom body, I clasped Oomaruru. With the speed of light we flew and flew. Half way I felt jerked back. That was the point

where the radio waves from Mars and earth clashed and created a chaos. The grace of God helped me through. I saw a giant red glow in front of me: Mars. We got nearer and nearer and alighted inside a radio station. Oomaruru called out: "That man is a medium, and jump into his body."

"I did so and looked at things through his eyes. I saw many radio towers, with sparks flashing, and antennas for reception. But the revolutions of Mars imposed a terrific strain on the etheric band that tied me to my body. I felt I was in deadly danger. As if drawn back by a snapped elastic, I felt I was rushing back to earth. In four minutes I was back and told my son of my experience."

As Robinson told it, Martian attempts to signal earth had started around 1900. With him on their side now, they had a new champion who would do his utmost to usher in a new age of interplanetary comity.

In 1921, when a London department store secured high-powered receivers which could receive signals in the then-unprecedented 30,000-meter-length range, Robinson and radio engineer Ernest B. Rogers asked it to open itself to Martian signals at a specific time. The signals were to repeat certain letters of the alphabet in a sealed envelope Robinson had given to Rogers.

Allegedly, the message came in when it was supposed to, with the requested letters. According to Robinson, "A schoolmaster in Ilfracomb, Devonshire, who had the proper apparatus and with whom I made plans to experiment, received the same

was in itself an extraordinary fact. But quite as inexplicable was the uncanny hush that preceded the call. The loud working of the various commercial stations suddenly faded and died down, and it was on a queerly quiet background that the M-M came through. The whole effect of the signals was very weird and mystifying and it certainly created a sensation for the critical crowd of listeners that filled the room."

Robinson next hit the front pages in October 1928, when he sent a telegraphic message, at 36 cents a word, from England's Rugby Wireless Station. The coded communication read: "Love to Mars from earth." Robinson and two others, one of them United Press reporter Henry T. Russell, gathered at the home of scientist A. M. Low, who had encouraged Robinson's experiment, to await the Martians' reply. At one point, Russell wrote, a seemingly entranced Robinson mumbled, "It's coming, it's through. They tell me they are sending it now. Everything's all right."

Just then, eight minutes after the initial message had been sent, a long wireless message arrived, and a few minutes later, another followed. "It was very mysterious," Low asserted, "but it is hardly likely that it was a message from Mars. However, I must confess I do not know who sent it. One striking thing about it was that it was not an ordinary message. It was a long series of undecipherable dots and dashes. For example, at one time there were 11 dots followed by three dashes."

Oomaruru herself denied that Mar-



An issue of *Popular Wireless* from 1926.

tians had sent any signals. That was because, she said (in a telepathic communication with Robinson), "Mars received neither message. Do not attempt to use the Rugby station again, but make the next attempt from America."

### Martian Trumpets

At the same time, Robinson was claiming to possess a recording of the Martian national anthem, received through a medium friend. To Fodor he said that the Martians "speak like giants. Their voices roll and rock the room."

Fodor went with Robinson to see the medium, Mrs. St. John James, wife of a London clergyman, and was unimpressed. All he heard, he wrote, was "loud gibberish... the worst imitation of mediumship I ever witnessed."

mysterious signals, this time a complete sentence in Martian: UM GA WA NA. It means God is All in All. It was my birthday, and Oomaruru wanted to please me. I asked for one more test: a signal that would last for a quarter of an hour. We got it, twice in sequence, with terrific energy."

### Curious Reports

In telepathic exchanges (Robinson always sensed them coming when he felt a pain in his left temple), Oomaruru revealed that she had a husband and son and, moreover, lived on earth long ago in Egypt (as, of course, no less than Cleopatra). She and her fellow Martians wanted to help earthlings but would not force more on them than they could grasp at their state of scientific and ethical development. "There are different races on Mars, just as on this earth," he told reporters. "The cultured ones do not differ much from us. But there are Martians who look like rats."

Even the "cultured" Martians, however, were an odd-appearing bunch, if one can judge from drawings produced under Robinson's guidance. Their ears are enormous, and their heads point upwards in long, slanting cones with the apparent textures of acorns. The men are seven and a half feet tall, the women six feet tall. They have "huge shocks of hair and Chinese features," Robinson said. "They smoke pipes and drink tea from the spouts of kettles." They have airships, trains, and cars, and their diets consist three "electrified" apples a day.

Robinson's curious beliefs, which included knowledge of other inhabited planets, for example Venus, whose people are "particularly nice," attracted only limited attention until October 1926 and again two years later, when they were the subject of international press coverage, most, though not quite all, of the tongue-in-cheek variety. If nothing else, Robinson would prove himself to be a committed publicity hound who left a remarkable paper trail as he lurched from one folly to another.

The first widely publicized episode concerned a telepathic message Robinson allegedly received from his Martian friends, who promised to send three words (*opesti nipitia secombra*) via radio signal to a London receiving station at an agreed-upon time. Robinson put the words into a sealed envelope. When the story leaked to the press and ridicule followed, the radio station refused to cooperate. If there was a signal, it went unheard.

Robinson had a back-up plan, however, and a different London radio station heard another message at the appointed moment, not the three words, but two Morse code signs for the letter "M," presumably for "Mars." A *Popular Wireless* writer, who was present, related in the October 12 issue:

"Several expert telegraphists were amongst the company that actually heard the 'M's' and there is no doubt whatever of their mysterious nature. The coming of the two Morse letters without any accompanying call sign or means of identification

Robinson also worked with American medium Suzanna Harris. On the afternoon of the radio experiment, he sat in on a séance during which she "emitted an ectoplasm... That ectoplasm... raised two trumpets... The Martians then blew on the trumpets."

Fodor was also present at a failed wireless contact attempt in January 1929, when Robinson was to receive a "recessional Swan Song" from the Martians as their planet spun out of opposition for two years.

In December, Robinson tried radio messages again, this time from a station in Rio de Janeiro. The already comical grew farcical when he announced that this time he would have the assistance of a psychic dog named Nell. In August 1932 an article in *The Guardian* reported that Robinson had perfected an "instrument," undescribed and possibly nothing more than Mrs. James's mediumship, which enabled him to effect easy communication with his Martian friends. He said they were monitoring events on earth with much interest. According to Oomaruru, the world would soon face a great crisis. With World War II just over the horizon, she was certainly prescient in that regard, at least.

But Robinson, whose ambition was clearly to be a world figure, was slipping into obscurity. A last press-wire story about him appeared on March 3, 1933, when he repeated his claim of continuing contacts. The evening before, he said, he had talked through Mrs. James with Oomaruru and two other Martians. Robinson played a

recording in which Oomaruru sternly urged earthlings: "Forsake mammon, lust, and luxury. Turn to God in your troubles. Return to the simple life, and your former greatness will return."

Reviewing the forgotten episode a quarter-century later, a still-amused Fodor recalled Robinson "as slippery as a human eel."

Stories of Martians, living on their world or visiting the earth, were revived in the first decade or so of the UFO age. The stories may not have been believable, but at least they reflected lingering scientific speculation about the possibility of intelligent beings on the red planet. When such speculation died for want of evidence, the visions of contactees expanded outward beyond the solar system and into the interstellar regions where advanced extraterrestrials, if they're there, are more likely to be found. †

*Jerome Clark was an editor of FATE from 1976 to 1989, when it was published in Highland Park, Illinois, and owned by the late Curtis and Mary Margaret Fuller. He is the author of a number of books, including the multivolume, prize-winning The UFO Encyclopedia: The Phenomenon from the Beginning. He lives in southwestern Minnesota.*

