

Flying SAUCERERS



Re-examining the dawn of the
modern era of UFOs

by *The Emperor*

In my previous piece¹ for *Darklore* (Volume 3) I looked at the odd connections between occultists and science fiction writers, at the core of which lay the strange duo of rocket scientist and occultist Jack Parsons, and science fiction author-come-religious guru L. Ron Hubbard. The overarching themes were: the influence of science fiction on Parsons' occult (and rocketry) ideas, the possibility that some things were essentially fiction presented as fact (the Philadelphia Experiment, and perhaps even the Strategic Defense Initiative) and that some events in their story were forms of the 'Big Con'.²

Here we will be looking at 'the Saucerers': an oddly closely-knit group of men from the science fiction and occult communities who,

through accident or design, managed to conjure the flying saucers into existence. Specifically we'll be examining the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH) that grew from this. For clarity's sake: this is the idea that aliens are visiting us in flying saucers and taking an interest in human affairs. There are, clearly, numerous theories that might involve aliens or visitors from... elsewhere (perhaps in time, possibly from another dimension) but this seems to be the general idea the man in the street has. Other more exotic variations on the theme require examinations of different individuals and their theories.

However, before we look at these characters at the Dawn of the Modern Era of UFOs, we need to peek back into those strange pre-dawn years when the foundations were put into place for the bizarre edifice that would later be built.

BEFORE THE DAWN

Although Emanuel Swedenborg was reporting journeys to other planets back in the 18th century,³ the origins of the ETH lie at the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th. Here we see H.G. Wells' Martians visiting in fiction and Helene Smith making the return journey in... 'fact'.⁴ Despite some suggestions that the craft seen in the 1896–1897 airship flap were from Mars,⁵ the first significant linking of strange lights in the sky with alien visitors was in the proto-fology of Charles Fort. However, other people were also reporting contact with aliens a number of years before Fort started publishing his findings.

In my previous article I raised the possibility that science fiction was being passed off as factual accounts of real events, and when we go back to the late 19th century we find Theosophy, which did this blatantly. And, in doing so, laid the foundations for the ETH.

The movement's hugely influential founder, Helena Blavatsky, produced two key volumes, *Isis Unveiled* (1877)⁶ and *The Secret*

Doctrine (1888),⁷ which claimed to synthesise the wisdom of the ancients. However, William Coleman looked at the sources and found a lot to be concerned about: rather than drawing on vast numbers of ancient texts, Blavatsky had copied large sections from a limited number of relatively recent books.⁸



H.P. Blavatsky

For our purposes, what is relevant is that she also drew heavily on speculative fiction, in particular the work of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, best known these days for the opening line "it was a dark and stormy night." It is his hollow earth novel *The Coming Race* (1871) which provided Theosophy with the concept of the 'Vril' power, but Blavatsky also drew on a range of his books. According to Prof. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, an expert on Western Esotericism:

Her fascination with Egypt as the fount of all wisdom arose from her enthusiastic reading of the English author Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton. His novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) had been conceived of as a narrative of the impact of the Isis cult in Rome during the first century AD. His later works, *Zanoni* (1842), *A Strange Story* (1862), and *The Coming Race* (1871), also dwelt on esoteric initiation and secret fraternities dedicated to occult knowledge in a way which exercised an extraordinary fascination on the romantic mind of the nineteenth century. It is ironical that early theosophy should have been principally inspired by English occult fiction.⁹

This didn't end with Blavatsky's books, though. This information was passed on and the provenance obfuscated with each iteration:

An entire procession of cults and obscure religious sects has followed Blavatsky's lead, copying their doctrines from her and

from one another while simultaneously denying their true sources and instead attributing their second- and third-hand revelations to further contact with the Hidden Masters of the Great White Brotherhood. This process has been called “genealogical dissociation” (Johnson 1995; 158) and has continued through groups more-or-less in the classical Theosophical mold, such as Guy Ballard’s I AM or Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s Church Universal and Triumphant, and also into more up-to-date models in the form of the flying saucer contactee cults that replace the Hidden Masters in their Himalayan hideaways with Space Brothers winging in their cosmic wisdom from Venus or the Pleiades. J. Gordon Melton has noted that the flying saucer is practically the only new element of the story -- many of the older tales had the element of interplanetary travel already, such as Blavatsky’s Hidden Masters originating in the distant past when the Lords of Flame traveled to earth from Venus -- and that even this element is often absent from current contact accounts, leaving them almost indistinguishable from nineteenth-century accounts.¹⁰

For example, Guy Ballard, and other Theosophists, gravitated towards Mount Shasta in California. The interest in this location was sparked by Frederick Spencer Oliver’s 1905 book *A Dweller on Two Planets*,¹¹ which tells of Lemurians escaping the destruction of their home and taking up residence under the mountain. The book, written between 1883/1884 and 1886, but only published after Oliver’s death, was allegedly channelled through automatic writing. However, it is essentially science fiction, or according to L. Sprague de Camp (who we met in the last *Darklore* piece) “a tiresome occult novel.”¹² According to the 2002 introduction by John B. Hare, who also considers it “a work of speculative fiction”:

This book is openly acknowledged as source material for many new age belief systems, including the once-popular “I AM” movement

(whose founder, Guy Ballard, plagiarized extensively from this book), the Lemurian Fellowship, and Elizabeth Claire Prophet. According to Shirley MacLaine, *A Dweller on Two Planets* jumped out of a bookshelf into her hands in a New Age bookstore in Hong Kong (and obviously had a big influence on her subsequently).

Although Blavatsky included Ascended Masters from Venus, it was never a core of her teachings – it was Ballard who would “become the first to actually build a religion on contact with extraterrestrials.”¹³ He claimed that he was in frequent contact with them, being visited by Venusians while at Mount Shasta. The important distinction, as noted above, is that these interplanetary journeys (usually within the Solar System, as understood by science at the time) were done through more mystical means.

Contact was often made through channelling and automatic writing and “following the lead of the fantastic voyage novels, contactees either travelled astrally, woke up from a sleep to find themselves mysteriously transported to their destination, or experience some form of what might be called dematerialization” – a mode of transport best known through fiction, like John Carter’s voyages to Mars, first written about by Edgar Rice Burroughs in 1919.¹⁴ What is missing is the idea of the flying saucer itself – for that we have to look to another source, which has its roots in the work of Charles Fort.

While Fort’s ideas were carried on in their original form by the Fortean Society, it was another group altogether that would expose his work to a wider audience – science fiction authors. Jerome Clark has said that the *Books of Charles Fort* (1941) were “a classic only in the cult sense, functioning mostly as a source of ideas for science fiction writers.”¹⁵ In particular this included a serialisation of *Lo!*, starting in the April 1934 edition of *Astounding Science Fiction*, the leading magazine to spearhead the ‘Golden Age of Science Fiction’ (publishing a large number of the key players in my last *Darklore* article). Arthur C. Clarke has said, “No choice could have been more

appropriate for a science fiction magazine, and Fort's writing was to have an immense influence on the field," in particular on the young Clarke. "I found his eccentric – even explosive – style stimulating and even mind-expanding," Clare would later write, and it is evident in his various television series on strange phenomena.¹⁶ We also know others read his work: Lovecraft checked out a number of his books from the library and even name-checked him a few times in his books.¹⁷ The dark theme behind the phrase "we are property" proved especially influential, as were the early glimmerings of the ancient astronaut idea,¹⁸ with some of the related ideas having Theosophical overtones.¹⁹ It would even be science fiction writer Damon Knight who helped with the rediscovery of Fort in the later parts of the 20th century, writing the biography *Charles Fort: Prophet of the Unexplained* (1970) and overseeing the release of the *Complete Works of Charles Fort* (1974).²⁰

With these ideas simmering away in the background during the first half of the 20th century, we now turn to look at how they emerged fully-formed as the ETH in the very early hours of the Dawn of the Modern Era of UFOs.

RAY PALMER

The late John Keel, the famous Fortean investigator best known for his *Mothman Prophecies*, has described Ray Palmer as "The Man Who Invented Flying Saucers," and this wouldn't be far wrong.²¹ In 1938, Palmer took over as the editor of an ailing science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, that would have sunk without trace except for a chance discovery in the, normally rejected, crank pile. The letter was from one Richard Shaver, and was published in the December 1943 issue. The reader response to Shaver's description of an ancient alphabet prompted Palmer to ask for more material. He received "A Warning for Man," a 10,000-word piece which Palmer

then reworked into a 31,000-word story with the more impressive (and Theosophically-influenced) name "I Remember Lemuria!" Published in March 1945,²² this wild 'true story' told of "death rays, tunnelling machines, high-tech ancient civilizations and even flying disks!"²³ These stories, and subsequent tales – mainly revolving around the underground-dwelling race of 'Deros', with evil plans for us surface dwellers – proved an instant hit. Letters flew in and the circulation would grow by an order of magnitude until it was one of the most successful sci-fi magazines, selling a quarter of a million copies and moving from being a quarterly to a monthly.²⁴ Although it could be dismissed as the ramblings of a paranoid schizophrenic, there was a degree of effort put into making these stories readable and engaging:

Shaver's stories were heavily rewritten by Ray Palmer originally, and then later by other writers who were assigned to The Shaver Mystery job by Palmer...

...Palmer was the publishing genius behind Shaver, and it was no doubt Palmer's sophisticated knowledge of literature, science fiction and contemporary science, myth and legend that propelled The Shaver Mystery into the public eye so successfully.²⁵

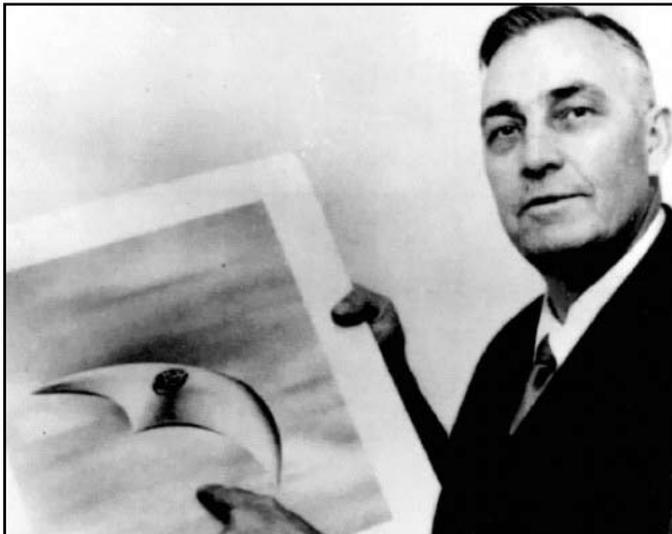
Another key story at this time was Harold Sherman's Green Man tales, "The Green Man" (October 1946) and "The Green Man Returns" (December 1947), which also appeared in Palmer's *Amazing Stories*. The tales – featuring Numar, the green-hued main character – were apparently inspired by Sherman's own odd experience:

Sometime in the year 1945, when Martha and I were living in Chicago, I had a series of visions wherein I saw Space Beings, possessed of high intelligence, visiting our Earth in space ships of different shapes and sizes, for the purpose of exploration and

eventually to fill our skies with large space vehicles, coming in force, hopefully on a friendly mission to help Mankind save itself from self-destruction.²⁶

So, by 1947, large numbers of readers were following the advice/warning that would become enshrined in the end of the 1951 film *The Thing From Another World*: “Watch the skies!”²⁷ They didn’t have long to wait.

While flying near Mount Rainier, Washington, pilot Kenneth Arnold famously sighted a number of UFOs on June 24, 1947, which now officially marks the start of the Modern Era of UFOs. However, although the press coverage spawned the term ‘flying saucer’, the objects weren’t classic flying saucers, being described as something more like a flying wing (half-moon or bat-wing). In addition there was no claim that they were alien vehicles. However, Palmer spotted the parallels with the stories he’d been publishing, and quickly moved to jump on that particular bandwagon – a letter from Ray Palmer to Kenneth Arnold arrived on July 15.²⁸ Palmer would send Arnold



Kenneth Arnold with diagram of ‘flying saucer’

off to investigate the Maury Island Incident, which ‘happened’ three days before Arnold’s sightings. It would prove to be a strange conspiracy quagmire: suggestions of bugging emerged, and the main figure, Fred Crisman – who was known to Palmer²⁹ – would go on to be linked with the JFK assassination.³⁰

Palmer, with a keen eye on the *zeitgeist*, launched a factual magazine in 1948 called *Fate*, and the first issue included Arnold’s account of his encounter. The two would then collaborate on a book that expanded on this, *The Coming of the Saucers* (1952), published by Palmer’s Amherst Press.

Despite the fact that whatever Arnold saw wasn’t actually shaped like the classic flying saucer, the term proved suitably evocative and it was up to science fiction again to provide the image. The back cover of the November 1947 edition of Palmer’s *Fantastic Adventures* featured “a flotilla of golden saucers above the New York skyline, and the words: ‘Will the ancient gods of Egypt and other lost civilisations come back to Earth in time to avert an atom war?’”³¹

As the UFO phenomena evolved, we find Palmer’s fingerprints all over the work of the early contactees. For example, Orfeo Angelucci worked at the Lockheed aircraft plant in California, not long after one of the giants of the early Contactee movement, George van Tassel, had left.³² In his 1955 book *The Secret of the Saucers* Angelucci describes how, on his way home from work, he would occasionally bump into aliens and their flying saucers. However, the origin of this seems to go back to the job he had before joining Lockheed, as he describes himself in his book:

For several months I worked as manager of the Los Feliz Club House. In my spare time I endeavored to write a motion picture script. It was more of a hobby than anything else. I didn’t really expect the script to be accepted as I’d had no writing experience. As the idea of space travel was quite popular in the films then, I concentrated on a story about an imaginary trip to the moon.

Several studios were interested in the finished manuscript, but it was never made into a motion picture.³³

This has led one commentator to note...

Orfeo Angelucci's contactee story began as a movie script titled *Worlds are Mad Tonight*. He came to realize it had little financial potential and "lay gathering dust and forgotten" before the aliens came forward to tell him it was true.³⁴

It gets even more interesting though, because this book was published by Ray Palmer's Amherst Press, and it appears Palmer was involved at every stage. Of course, Palmer was the editor and publisher, but there is something odd about the book's credits, as described in the 2007 introduction:

Angelucci's name doesn't appear on the title page, simply Palmer as editor. Angelucci is, strangely, only listed as a copyright holder. ... The book makes a brisk read (again, a hallmark of Palmer), and if you suspend disbelief, it works as science fiction as well.

As we've seen with Shaver, Palmer took a very 'hands on' approach to his 'editing' and this seems to be no exception.

It was also Palmer's *Fate* that gave an early venue to the man who would take the flying saucer story up to a new level. In *Fate's* July 1951 edition was an article entitled "I Photographed Space Ships" – by one 'Prof.' George Adamski.³⁵

GEORGE ADAMSKI

Adamski's story is a strange and complex one.³⁶ He had established the Royal Order of Tibet during the late 1920s, which preached a

Theosophical-based philosophy, although Adamski claimed it was really a front for bootleg liquor during the Prohibition.³⁷ However, the group continued on after the end of Prohibition in 1933 and started publishing books and pamphlets in 1936. They also moved on from their initial base at Laguna Beach, California and, after a time on a nearby ranch, he and his followers ended up at Mount Palomar in 1944.³⁸ There they lived in a commune with Adamski working in a restaurant catering to people visiting the Mount Palomar Observatory, further up the mountain.³⁹ His involvement with UFOs started with a series of sightings, one in October 1946 and another only weeks after Arnold's had hit the news.⁴⁰ This all seemed par for the course in the late forties, but things got interesting toward the end of 1949 when four military men dropped by – including two scientists from the Point Loma Naval Electronics Laboratory who asked Adamski if he could provide any photographs.⁴¹ He soon obliged, and it was these sensational images which garnered Adamski a lot of interest at the time...and a huge amount of scorn later, as they were obviously rather bad fakes.

Although stuck up the side of a mountain, Adamski seems to have had strong connections with other contactees and esoteric groups of the period. According to Jacques Vallee, Adamski had connections with the occult fascist William Dudley Pelley.⁴² Pelley had mystical experiences before WWII and become a supporter of Hitler during the war, which led to him being jailed for treason. He was only released on the understanding that he avoided politics, leading him to return to his more esoteric interests. Although there was strong crossover between his followers and Guy Ballard's group, it was in the post-war period, around 1950, that another important individual, George Hunt Williamson worked for Pelley. The latter may have even introduced Williamson to Adamski.⁴³

Together Adamski and Williamson would be part of one of the most important events in the early years of the Modern Era of UFOs, when they travelled into the Mojave Desert on November 20,

1952. Leaving the rest of the party, Adamski met Orthon, a Nordic Venusian. After the alien had departed Williamson took plaster casts of some footprints, that are said to have included a reversed swastika in the pattern.⁴⁴

The first of Adamski's books on his encounters with flying saucers and their occupants, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, was released in 1953. Surprisingly, he did not write the bulk of it; instead, large portions were penned by British Theosophist Desmond Leslie. In keeping with the broader themes of this piece, Leslie's journey started when his publisher asked him to research UFOs for a science fiction story and he ended up concluding they were real.⁴⁵ Leslie's contribution would also be significant because it was very Fortean in tone with a distinctly Theosophical spin to it, putting forward the case for ancient visitations by aliens.⁴⁶

Williamson would go on to write *Other Tongues – Other Flesh*, published in 1953 by... yes you guessed it, Ray Palmer's Amherst Press. According to Donna Kossy, "Williamson's version of the origin of humanity draws heavily on Pelley's *Star Guests*, which itself draws from 'I AM' (Guy and Edna Ballard's 'Ascended Master' cult which flourished in the 1930s), Theosophy, the Bible and possibly other sources."⁴⁷ Mankind's ultimate origin was said to be Sirius, but the Earth was, he claimed, also populated by other sinister races from places like Orion. This leads Kossy to conclude "Many of the space brothers' messages, as received by contactees such as Williamson and Adamski, are transparent right-wing political statements whose authority is legitimised because they come from a 'higher intelligence'.⁴⁸

The Theosophy link here is also important as it not only plugs Adamski firmly into the broader occult scene in California, but also seems to be a continuation of the long 'tradition' of basing your teachings on science fiction. The main difference here is that the science fiction he lifted and presented as fact, was his own. Adamski's earlier science fiction novel was little known, until it was reprinted recently, and Marc Hallet had to order a copy from the

Library of Congress. His findings, when he got to read the book, were quite startling – almost all of Adamski's space adventures were actually already all there in the earlier, fictional, work, something Palmer knew well:⁴⁹

Inside The Space Ships is nothing more than a science fiction book. The best proof we have of this is that it is a "remake" of a science-fiction book entitled *Pioneers of Space* which Adamski wrote in 1949.

...To your surprise you will discover that these two books give exactly the same descriptions of space (with the fireflies), the Moon (with snow on mountains, forests, lakes, artificial hangers and even small running animals), the scout ship (with the great lens in the middle of the cabin and the graphs on the walls), the mother ship (with its two "skins"), and even little details such as the portrait of the Great One in the mother ship, the famous Saturnian badge with the balance, etc... You will also be pleased also to see that the Masters' pompous statements are exactly the same, something that demonstrates that Adamski had a poor imagination and was unable to create new or original philosophical concepts. His lack of imagination was so great that his book *Cosmic Philosophy* published in 1961 was mainly based on texts he had written in the '30s.⁵⁰

However, there is one element that is not from his books which helped make his story one of the most compelling from the early Contactee era – the meeting of a Venusian in the Mojave Desert.

Given Adamski's fondness for 'recycling', and apparent problems with coming up with new material, the question arises: where did he get this idea from? The answer may come from an examination of the wider occult vortex in California, and it brings us back to the focus of my previous piece in *Darklore*: Jack Parsons and L. Ron

Hubbard. In 1946, while the two were engaged in occult rituals in Pasadena, Jack Parsons claims to have met a Venusian in the Mojave Desert.⁵¹ The exact timing and context are unclear, but as he was apparently alone, this appears to be the time when his magickal partners L. Ron Hubbard and Marjorie Cameron were both away. During this time, on February 28, 1946, Parsons went into the Mojave Desert and ‘received’ *Liber 49, The Book of Babalon*. He said of the experience “[t]he presence of the Goddess came upon me and I was commanded to write the following communications.”⁵² According to biographer John Carter, “[t]he Venusian apparently was the implied source of *Liber 49*.”⁵³

Both Adamski and Parsons were part of the occult scene in California, although the latter seems more central, with authors and adepts dropping by his house when they were in town. However, there are more explicit links. According to one of Parsons’ biographers: “[Max] Schneider and his wife had a small cabin on Mount Palomar that members of the lodge often used for short retreats.”⁵⁴ Paul Rydeen provides more details of the Palomar link:

In “Alchemical Conspiracy and the Death of the West” Michael Hoffman writes of Parsons. Hoffman tells us that the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) had a temple on nearby Mount Palomar. The local Indians regarded the mountain as holy. Hoffman says, “The OTO believed that Palomar was the sexual chakra of the Earth.” Parsons commuted regularly between Palomar and Pasadena. The Mount Palomar Observatory opened in 1949. Smith probably consecrated his temple on Palomar soon after his move to California in 1930, before the Observatory was planned.⁵⁵

There is one final potential link, which, if proved, would show the direct line of transmission of this last piece of the jigsaw. It has been suggested that Hubbard and Adamski met in 1951 (i.e. after Hubbard and Parsons’ relationship had soured, but a year before

Adamski said he met the aliens in the Mojave), and discussed science fiction and UFOs.⁵⁶

BEYOND ADAMSKI

Charles Laughead is one of the best examples of the way people would rattle around the occult/contactee scene in the early days of the Modern Era of UFOs. He and his wife seem to have had a crisis of faith in the late 1940s and gone on the search for enlightenment, which brought them into contact with the group coalescing around Marion Keech (real name Dorothy Martin) in 1949–1950.⁵⁷ This group started channelling contacts with aliens (which, as we’ve seen, continued seamlessly from the Theosophical groups into the contactees) and started producing messages about a coming apocalypse in December 1954. This caught the attention of the media and, through them, a group of sociologists and psychologists who infiltrated the group and were able to monitor the dynamics as the deadline of doom came and went – resulting in one of the best books on the topic, *When Prophecy Fails* (1956). Although they put it all down to a simple group state, there were certainly strange events swirling around the group, including a number of odd visitors, some of whom might later have been described as Men in Black. Following the collapse of the group, Keech returned to Hubbard’s Dianetics movement, which she had earlier been involved with, and would later journey to Peru where she and George Hunt Williamson established the Abbey of the Seven Rays in 1957. The Laugheads were also in Williamson’s orbit – but they also, importantly, met Dr. Andrija Puharich.

Puharich is perhaps best known for being Uri Geller’s mentor, but he had been researching parapsychology since the late 1940s. In December 1952 he was working with Dr D.G. Vinod, who started channelling communications from a group calling themselves ‘The

Nine'. These communications continued on and off until 1953, when, in front of a group of nine (including people like Arthur M. Young⁵⁸), they revealed themselves as the various aspects of God. Laughead and his wife would come into contact with Puharich and Young three years later in a Mexican hotel. While Puharich was not initially impressed by the information passed on to him (apparently channelled by Williamson), a follow-up letter from Laughead made him pay attention because the communications it contained paralleled what he had received via Vinod, adding an extraterrestrial spin to proceedings. This seemed to be independent confirmation of the information, and the Nine would simmer away in the background until he met Uri Geller in the seventies when, after asking Geller leading questions under hypnotism, he seems to have got in contact with similar entities. Those who have read the previous article may start to spot a similar situation to the ones we saw with Parsons, Jessup and Bennewitz, in which an individual is an unknowing 'actor' in a 'play' where the other 'actors' have access to the 'script'. Basically, it looks like Puharich is the focus of a Big Con – the information would only be convincing if the sources were really independent. Given Laughead's links throughout the occult/contactee groups, and the way he kept popping up like a Joker in the pack, there must be the suspicion that he was able to access enough information to fool Puharich. Why anyone would do this is unclear, as he ran CIA-sponsored remote viewing experiments and is considered to be very much an insider. However, it could be read a different way. Could Puharich's beliefs have been deliberately altered early on? This would then result in him being an unwitting actor in later events, which included widespread use of hypnosis to recover further information from Geller, which we know tends to generate a fiction based on a mix of the therapist's and the patient's beliefs.⁵⁹ If so, this would mean the idea of the Nine originated elsewhere, and Puharich was manipulated into believing it was true.

N. Meade Layne was also in Southern California, had links with the OTO and was member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Layne's contacts spanned the occult/contactee world, and he established Borderlands Science Research Associates (now Foundation) in 1945, which was discussing UFOs before even Arnold's sightings. One key role was in publicising information emerging from other sources. These included the channelling of 'E Yada Da Shi'ite' from the 'Interplanetary High Council' by Mark Probert, which "in early 1946...swerved into the same new theme Harold Sherman caught in his story 'The Green Man' – the imminent arrival of extraterrestrial craft in Earth's skies."⁶⁰ So it wasn't just the science fiction fans who were watching the skies in 1946/1947.

CONCLUSION

I must admit when I was younger and knew less about UFOs I had assumed the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis stemmed from...you know, aliens visiting us. However, the true origins appear to lie in the occultists and science fiction writers (and some science fiction-writing occultists) who jumped on Arnold's sighting of...something, and promoted the idea that these were the alien visitors they'd been writing about/talking to for the decades running up to 1947. Some would even go on to 'meet' these visitors from the stars. These individuals tend to fall into two groups. On the east coast we have the Chicago group associated with Raymond Palmer, "the man who invented flying saucers," which also included Harold Sherman. They had effectively primed the pump and moved hard and fast to dominate the very earliest sightings and publications. On the west coast there is the giant cauldron of California containing the powerful mix of the occult, sci-fi and UFOs. It is here that the ball Palmer put into play was picked up and run with. However, we also see his direct influence, working on and publishing books and articles from this group.

There is also another organization which certainly moved quickly in the wake of Kenneth Arnold's sighting (even if it was not overly successful in anticipating it). In light of the details covered earlier, the July 8, 1947 announcement by the Air Force that a flying saucer had crashed at Roswell – coming so soon after Arnold's (during the initial wave of excitement it generated) – seems suspicious, as it was perfectly timed to keep the momentum going with an official acknowledgement of the phenomena (even if it was rapidly withdrawn). We also have the active involvement of the Navy in Adamski's story. While we might expect to find them in connection with the Philadelphia Experiment (as it was allegedly a Navy project) and Parsons (who had contracts with the Navy), it is definitely odd in this context – and a wider examination of the field shows them popping up in strange places.⁶¹

On analysing the Modern Era of UFOs we see it less as a new phenomena and more an evolution of existing ideas. Theosophy's Ascended Masters became increasingly extraterrestrial, and contact with them moved from channelling, to their arriving in space ships (although, as we've seen, channelling was still important long after flying saucers appeared in the skies). The home of the 'aliens' has also changed – moving further away from the Earth as science brought us more information about the planets, forcing them to 'abandon' Mars, with its canals, for Venus and then the outer planets in the Solar System, before heading out into deep space. We can also see the abduction phenomena as a further evolution, one which shed a lot of the mystical trappings and made it a lot more personal and more modern – emphasising technology, and ditching uplifting messages for darker medical interventions.

What I do want to emphasize though is that I am not dismissing the majority of UFO reports as science fiction. My concern is that the peculiar mix of individuals had already defined the 'story' long before the Dawn of the Modern Era of UFOs, and they moved quickly to put their version of this story into place within days. A few years later this mythos was firmly in place and a number of the

leading flying saucer proponents were perfectly happy to rebrand their science fiction as *bona fide* science fact. This established a framework that other people used to interpret their strange experiences, creating a positive feedback loop that reinforced the prevailing paradigm. The introduction of hypnotically-recovered memories made this even more problematic because – as has been ably described elsewhere⁶² – the hypnotist and/or the subject's worldview can shape the memories. This can result in apparently consistent accounts that also help convince people of the reality of this idea.

There is another issue too. Ufology, which should be a broad and flexible discipline, is largely focused on flying saucers and their alien pilots. This serves to limit the scope of inquiry and pretty much guarantees that the broad consensus (especially amongst the general public) remains that they are in fact visitors from other worlds making a bit of a nuisance of themselves. As I showed in my first two articles for *Darklore*, there is an odd crossover between ufology and the wilder fringes of cryptozoology, with similar reports of strange clouds in connection with UFOs, religion and other Fortean phenomena. Greg Taylor also discussed this in relation to sounds in *Darklore Volume 1*, and there are many more such examples which suggest ufology isn't a discretely defined field.

The idea that the ETH (as described) is essentially artificial slots into a number of other ideas that are out there. Operation Bluelight is a pretty wild conspiracy theory that suggests some shadowy group are going to undermine the world's faiths, and then engineer a vast faked alien armada that would help them impose a new global UFO religion.⁶³ We could say that this fits into a class of ideas we'll call the 'Strong Watchmen Plan' – after Alan Moore's classic comic book series, in which one of the superheroes launches a vast scheme to create such an overwhelming external threat that the people of Earth would have to back away from the brink of Mutually Assured Destruction.



A more general idea for faking ‘the Voice of God’ (and possibly also using some kind of aerial hologram) goes back to the ideas put forward to get rid of Fidel Castro (which seem to have originated with Ian Fleming, who I mentioned in the last *Darklore*⁶⁴), and came up again with the invasion of Iraq in 1991.⁶⁵ Ufologist Jacques Vallee also stumbled across the infamous ‘Pentacle Memorandum’, which advocated that the military monitor specific places that had a lot of reported UFO activity, while further suggesting that “many different types of aerial activity should be secretly and purposefully scheduled within the area.”⁶⁶ As should be obvious, it might be possible to fake this in a limited way, for a handful of people – however, increasing it up to a planetary scale is almost impossible to do convincingly (and let us not forget that belief is a difficult thing to shift, even when presented with actual facts). The beauty of the concept put forward here is that you don’t need to go to all that trouble. Having the idea in place early means you don’t need to micromanage proceedings – people have been seeing lights in the sky, and meeting strange entities, throughout history; all you need to do is update the model they use to interpret their unusual experiences.

Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince have also looked at the interconnections between people in the occult/contactee groups and suggested that there was some kind of conspiracy at work. The main axis for this seems to be Andrija Puharich and the group channelling the Nine, but it also connects with Hubbard/Parsons and the CIA.⁶⁷ However, it would require Puharich to be some kind of *eminence gris*,⁶⁸ pulling a lot of the strings behind the scenes. But, as I noted earlier, at some points in his story he seems to have been the victim of at least one Big Con. Nevertheless, the connections they uncover are significant no matter what the underlying driving force is.⁶⁹

While researching this piece I came across John Michael Greer’s new book, *The UFO Phenomenon: Fact, Fantasy and Disinformation*, which parallels a lot of my thinking on the subject and helped fill in some gaps. Greer suggests what might be going on is what we could consider the ‘Weak Watchmen Plan’:

Attempts to shape the consciousness of a culture or an age using powerful symbolic patterns, in other words, are among the things occultists do. The possibility exists that something of the sort lies behind the remarkable involvement of the American occult community in the first days of the UFO phenomena. While it is certainly possible that figures such as Meade Layne and Harold Sherman, who predicted the arrival of the flying saucers in advance were simply reporting visions and dreams that would shortly burst out in a flurry of apparitions across America’s skies, the possibility has to be considered that these highly publicised reports were meant to cause such an event.

...it is at least possible that somewhere in the broad overlap between the American occult community and the science fiction scene, a group of occultists driven by the same sense of desperation set out to deliberately create the belief that extraterrestrial beings were about to intervene on Earth.

They may have hoped simply to inject just that moment of hesitation into the minds of politicians and generals that could keep them from plunging into a nuclear abyss.⁷⁰

In essence this was a magickal working on a grand scale – perhaps not designed to directly effect change, but to create a viral meme that aliens were concerned about our onward march to nuclear Armageddon. Science fiction gave them a ready-made audience, and also a means to present various scenarios in fictional form. One of the key works in that regard is the 1951 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Predating the rise of the high-profile Contactees, like Adamski, by a year, it showed a classic flying saucer landing in Washington so the pilot can deliver a message expressing the concern of the aliens about mankind’s development of nuclear weapons. It is believed to be the inspiration behind the off-script comments made by Ronald

Reagan during his 1985 meetings with Mikhail Gorbachev that helped end the Cold War.⁷¹ It is also worth noting that, in essence (and without the occult overtones) this Weak Watchmen Plan is very much along the lines of the possibility I raised in the last essay: that the concept of the Star Wars program (conceived by an odd mix of space scientists, military men, aerospace executives and science fiction writers, including Heinlein) had a similar effect in the last days of the Cold War, and may have brought the world back from the brink at that time.

Another idea comes from occultist/ufologist Allen Greenfield, who is also a bishop in the Gnostic Catholic Church, the ecclesiastical arm of the OTO. Greenfield knew a lot of the players in this story, which might qualify him to speak on these topics; he has more doomladen claims to make about a lot of individuals we have looked at:

UFO buffs have of late been touting a theory that Hubbard came to Parsons with a purpose more grandiose than “the ordinary confidence game.” In pulp magazine circles, he had encountered any number of occultists and border occultists (Talbot Mundy, Col. Arthur Burks, Major Donald Keyhoe, Ray Palmer and Richard S. Shaver come to mind), and had already formulated the core of the “inner Scientology teaching” outlined above. He wished to bring this other world into Manifestation, but lacked the technical knowledge to do so. So, he came to the innocent sex magician Jack Parsons. In this version, the Babalon Working, guided by Hubbard, had little to do with “Babalon” and more to do with the hideous Old Ones of the H.P. Lovecraft Cthulhu Mythos.⁷²

Speaking of Lovecraft, one particular quote from the great man of horror and science fiction springs to mind when discussing these issues. In a letter to Clark Ashton Smith, dated October 17, 1930, Lovecraft wrote:

My own rule is that no weird story can truly produce terror unless it is devised with all the care & verisimilitude of an actual hoax. The author must forget all about ‘short story technique’, and build up a stark, simple account, full of homely corroborative details, just as if he were actually trying to ‘put across’ a deception in real life – a deception clever enough to make adults believe it.⁷³

Personally, I don’t really see a grand conspiracy at work. It would require a number of people to have had an important role in stage-managing a large performance. A key figure would have to be Ray Palmer who doesn’t come across as some cunning mastermind. Unfortunately, he seems more driven by Fun and Profit; most of his influence on the field seems to be more opportunistic, spotting trends and exploiting them with little concern about the line between fact and fiction.⁷⁴

There are just too many separate groups with different (often murky) agendas pushing in often opposing directions. What seems to have emerged accidentally from the collision of these ideas was a modern mythology that provided a lens for interpreting strange events. A mythology which appears to be no more of an approximation to the underlying ‘truth’ than ideas of fairies and angels/demons were in earlier ages.

The Emperor was baptised in the diocese of Jerusalem and the morning after friends “proved” he was the Antichrist, he was nearly killed by two nuns. These facts may not be connected, but what if they are? He has written for *Fortean Times* and a number of British small press magazines and comics. He also blogs at the Cabinet of Wonders (www.wunderkabinett.co.uk) and elsewhere. In addition his “Black Hitler” won the Nazisploitation Nanofiction contest.