

LITTLE GREEN MEN

FROM AFAR

L. Sprague de Camp

Four of the authors represented in this volume are here because their stories were judged the best in their class for the year in which they were published. Sprague de Camp's award is something else. It isn't for a story. It is for a life. The Grand Master Nebula goes only to those who are judged to have made such significant contributions to the field of science fiction that no temporally limited award will suffice. Only four have ever been given—Robert A. Heinlein, Jack Williamson and Clifford D. Simak are the previous winners. To commemorate it for this volume, we asked Sprague de Camp to let us publish the text of an address: "Little Green Men from Afar."

In 1950, when the flying-saucer craze was enjoying its first boom, Francis F. Brahman, an instructor in general science at the University of Denver, staged an experiment to test his students' judgment of evidence. He presented to his class a self-styled flying-saucer expert. Brahman told his students to judge this man's tale by five criteria: that the report be first-hand; that the teller show no obvious bias or prejudice; that he be a trained observer; that the data be available for checking; and that the teller be clearly identified.

The class met on March 8. Students invited friends, so the classroom was crowded with strange and eager faces. The speaker was one Silas Newton.

'Winner, Grand Master Nebula of 1978.

He had, Newton said, learned from government officials that three unidentified flying objects, containing a total of thirty-four extraterrestrials, had crashed, killing all their occupants. These were little blond, beardless men, around three and a half feet tall. They became green only in later versions of the story.

A fourth saucer landed unharmed, and the little men got out. But they fled when officials approached

them, and their vehicle vanished.

Broman's class unanimously flunked Newton's story on all five criteria. He had, for instance, shown a bias against the U.S. Air Force. The tale, however, appeared in the Denver newspapers. Reporters flocked to interview Newton, who, it appeared, was promoting an alleged magnetic method of prospecting for oil. Newton repeated his story with embellishments. The vehicles, he said, were powered by magnetic lines of force, and those that crashed had run into something he called a "magnetic fault." This is pseudoscientific gobbledygook, signifying nothing. Also, he said, the government was trying to suppress all news of this visitation.

Even if Broman's students did not believe the story, many others did. Newton sold several articles about his saucerians. His friend Frank Scully, a theatrical journalist living in Hollywood, California, published a book, *Behind the Flying Saucers*. This puffed up Newton's claims and denounced the government for suppressing the truth about the saucerians.

Such circular logic is commonly used by pseudoscientists. You start by assuming what you wish to prove. If you assume that saucers have landed, why haven't they been exposed to view? Obviously, because the government has censored the news, and the fact that the government has squelched this information proves that the saucers exist. QED.

The tale of the shy saucerians has grown with retelling, so that the pygmy visitors are now firmly established in American folklore. Newton's tale has generated the usual imitations and elaborations. Recently, a pair of enterprising Texans, Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Lu Nettles, were traveling about calling themselves Bo and Peep, or simply the "Two." They have collected a gaggle of followers by promising to carry them all off in UFOs to a happier life on some other world. All the Two wanted was for their disciples to abandon all family ties and give the Two all their money.

In the history of cultism, one is always experiencing a feeling of déjà vu. Cultist beliefs have been confuted countless times but bob up again as lively as ever. The idea that the earth was once devastated by a comet began in the seventeenth century with a Cambridge professor, William Whiston. It was revived in the eighteenth by Count Gian Rinaldo Carli. It was revived again in the nineteenth by Ignatius Donnelly, who also made popular cults out of earlier scholarly speculations about the lost Atlantis and the idea that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. In our own times, the cometary-collision hypothesis has been revived with stunning success by Immanuel Velikovsky.

The story of the Two seems like a replay, with modern embellishments, of the Millerite agitation of 1843. William Miller, an upstate New York farmer, became convinced by his biblical studies that the world was about to end. When a shower of meteors and a passing comet aroused excitement, Miller gathered a following, who sold or gave away all their property in anticipation of the End. Their logic is hard to follow, since after the End nobody would have any use for property anyway.

On the appointed night, Millerites in white robes gathered on hilltops, the more easily to be caught up to Heaven with the rest of the righteous. Needless to say, nothing happened, and the dupes were obliged to go back to scratching a living as best they could.

The Newton episode and its sequels form but one thread in the long and tangled web of pseudoscientific belief. Beginning a decade ago, a Swiss bank employee named Erich von Daniken widely popularized the notion that no mere human beings could have built the pyramids of Egypt, the statues on Easter Island, and similar feats of pre-industrial engineering. These must, therefore, have been constructed by extraterrestrial visitors. The fact that Don Daniken's books are solid masses of misstatements, errors, and wild guesses presented as fact, unsupported by anything resembling scientific

data, has not stopped them from earning their author a much better living than he ever made back in Switzerland.

The idea of enlighteners from afar was not new when von Daniken took it up. It formed part of the teachings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy, and her successors. Madame Blavatsky was a big, fat Russian adventuress who, when she launched her cult in the 1870s, had already led a colorful career. She had lived in Europe, Egypt, and the United States. She had been a circus bareback rider, a professional pianist, a businesswoman, and a spiritualist medium. She had also been the mistress of, among others, a Slovenian singer, a Russian baron, and an English businessman.

In 1878 she moved to India, where her organization took final form. In 1885, she left India for good, after exposure of some of her magical tricks by a pair of disgruntled accomplices. Three years later, she published her chef-d'oeuvre, *The Secret Doctrine*, in which her credo took permanent if wildly confused shape. This work, in six volumes, is a mass of plagiarism and fakery, based upon contemporary scientific, pseudoscientific, mythological, and occult works, cribbed without credit and used in a blundering way that shows only skin-deep acquaintance with the topics discussed.

In addition to the gaudy Theosophical cosmos of multiple planes of existence and chains of planets, following each other in cycles from plane to plane, we are told that life on earth has evolved through seven cycles or Rounds. Man develops through seven Root Races, each comprising seven sub-races.

The First Root Race, we learn, was a kind of invisible astral jellyfish, dwelling in the polar Imperishable Sacred Land. The Second Root Race, a little more substantial, lived in the arctic continent of Hyperborea (derived, like Atlantis, from Greek myths and speculations). The Third Root Race were the gigantic, green, ape-like, hermaphroditic, egg-laying Lemurians, with four arms, and eyes in the backs of their heads. Edgar Rice Burroughs probably used Madame Blavatsky's Lemurians as models for his Martian green men.

The downfall of the Lemurians came with their discovery of sex. Madame Blavatsky took a dim view of sex, at least after she got too old to be interested in it herself. Lemuria, like Hyperborea before it, broke up by the subsidence of its parts, while Atlantis took shape. The Fourth Root Race we

the wholly human Atlantians; we are the Fifth; the Sixth and Seventh are yet to come.

After Madame Blavatsky died in 1891, her successors, clothed her skeletal account of lost continents and prehistoric races with a substantial body of detail. Her associate A.P. Sinnett, in *The Growth of the Soul* (1896) wrote:

From Venus, as all students of esoteric teaching will be aware, the guardians of our infant humanity in the later third and early fourth race of this world period descended to stimulate in our family the growth of the manistic principle [P. 277]

Madame's successor as head of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant, said in *The Pedigree of Man* (1908):

The third class of Manasaputras consists of Beings who come to our earth from another planetary chain. They . . . come from outside, from the Chain wherein the planet Venus, [or] 3hQkra, is Globe D. [P. ss ]

Not even Madame Blavatsky originated the idea of the enlighten era from afar. The concept belongs to a class of myths and legends of culture heroes, whotaught mankind what it needed to know in order to thrive. In Greece, the culture hero was Prometheus, who stole fire from Heaven and gave itto mankind against the orders of Zeus. In Egypt, he was Osiris . Among the North American Indians, hewas often called the Coyote.

In the naive old days when the earth was flat, the culture hero used to come down from Heaven. Astronomy, by showing that Heaven was mostly empty space, scotched this idea. Then the discovery that the planets were worlds provided a substitute. The idea that such worldsmight be inhabited was broached in the second century by the Syrian satirist Loukianos , or Lucian of Samosata . In his True History, Lucian told how a boatload of adventurers, snatched up into the heavens by a whirlwind, got involved in a war between the king of the sun and the king of the moon over the colonization of Venus.

Voltaire, in his Micromegas (1752), brought to earth an eight-mile-high visitor from Sirius and a slightly smaller native of Saturn. Because of their size, these beings have a hard time deciding whether there is intelligent life on earth. Some of us have trouble deciding that, too.

The reason for this persistent desire to credit the early  
advancesof mankind to superior beings -angels, demigods,  
or extraterreatrials-is simple. The vast majority never have  
anew idea that is at once origins], practicable, and a significant contribution to human progress. For this  
majority, to  
admitthat some human beings do have such ideas is to  
admitthat such people are more intelligent than they. No  
bodylikes to confess that he is stupider than someone else.

This is especially true now, when the world is high on an equality kick. It is fashionable in some circles to believe that all menare created literally equal. If they are not, it is unfair and undemocratic, and we should pretend that they are. To think otherwiseis called elitism, and you know what a wicked thing that is said to be.

Sothe enlighteners from afar, whether green or some other color , will be with us for some time to come. No explanation of how the little brown men of the Nile Valley actually built the pyramids will banish these exotic pedagogues, because belief in them panders to human vanity. Most people want reassurance, consolation, and flattery more than they want scientific facts.

The story of pseudoscientific cultism, of which the enlighteners in UFOs form but one small part, is depressing to believers in human rationality. Some cultist ideas, such as Cyrus Teed's notion of the 1890s that the earth is a hollow sphere with us inside, or the more recent one that fluoridation of drinking water is a Communist conspiracy by those notorious red-plotters Dwight Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and Earl Warren, are so absurd that they beguile few followers and soon fade away. Others attract huge followings and persist for generations.

During the past century, hundreds of thousands of such credophiles (as I like to call them) have believed, despite clear evidence to the contrary-

that Plato's Atlantis not only existed but also gave rise to all other civilizations;

that the descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel are the British, the Irish, the Japanese, the American Indians, or some other modern folk;

that the Great Pyramid of King Khufu at Giza embodies in its measurements a revelation of the wisdom of the ages and a prophecy of the future of man;

that in early historic times, a comet hit the earth, reversing its rotation and changing the length of its day;

that creatures from some other planet are keeping us under surveillance from spacecraft;

that visitors from another fictitious continent- Lemuria, in the Pacific- still dwell on Mount Shasta, in California, where they perform mystic rites with magical fireworks;

that William Shakespeare's plays were written by Sir

Francis Bacon, or the Earl of Oxford, or some other Elizabethan worthy;

that the ancient Babylonian superstition of astrology is an effective means of analyzing a personality and predicting the vicissitudes of the one possessing it;

and that in various parts of the world lurk large, picturesque animals left over from some prehistoric era, such as dinosaurs, ape-men, or the plesiosaur of Loch Ness.

As all good monster-fanciers know, the story of Nessie started with a tale of Saint Columba, a sixth-century Irish priest who went to Scotland and converted some of the Picts to Christianity. According to his biographer, another Irish cleric named Adomnan, about the year A.D. 565:

... when the blessed man was for a number of days in the province of the Picts, he had to cross the river Nea. When he reached its bank, he saw a poor fellow being buried by other inhabitants; and the buriers said that, while swimming not long before, he had been seized and most savagely bitten by a water beast. Sodiemen, going to his rescue in a wooden boat, though too late, had put out hooks and caught hold of his wretched corpse. When the blessed man heard this, he ordered notwithstanding that one of his companions should swim out and bring back to him, by sailing, a boat that stood on the opposite bank. Hearing this order of the holy and memorable man, Lugne mocu -Min obeyed without delay, and putting off his clothes, excepting his tunic, plunged into the water. But the monster, whose appetite had earlier been not so much sated as whetted for prey, lurked in the depth of the river. Feeling

the water above disturbed by Lugne's swimming, it suddenly swam up to the surface, and with gaping mouth and with great roaring rushed towards the man swimming in the middle of the stream. While all that were there, barbarians and even the brothers, were struck down with extreme terror, the blessed man, who was watching, raised his holy hand and drew the saving sign of the cross in the empty air; and then, invoking the name of God, he commanded the savage beast, and said: "You will go no further. Do not touch the man; turn backward speedily." Then, hearing this command of the saint, the beast, as if pulled back with ropes, fled terrified in swift retreat; although it had before approached so close to Lugne as he swam that there was no more than the length of one short pole between man and beast.

Then, seeing that the beast had withdrawn and that their fellow soldier Lugne had returned to them unharmed and safe, in the boat, the brothers with great amazement glorified God in the blessed man. And also the pagan barbarians who were there at the time, impelled by the magnitude of this miracle that they themselves had seen, magnified the God of the Christians.

According to Adomnan, Columba also, with God's help, saw events taking place far away or in the future, cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, controlled the winds, calmed storms at sea, summoned water from a rock, "turned water into wine, and destroyed evil-doers by his' curses. If you believe these marvels, there is no reason why, you should not believe in Nessie, too.

It is true that new species of animals are discovered from time to time. Only last year, a supposedly extinct species of peccary turned up alive in the Gran Chaco of Paraguay. It seems increasingly unlikely, however, that anymore large air-breathers remain to be found. So to discover new species, the most promising fields are either the deep-sea or very small organisms. The likeliest of all is the largest single order, in number of species, of all animals: the Cleoptera, or beetles. Of the million-odd known species of animals, about one fifth are beetles. So, if you itch to discover a new species, a new kind of beetle is your best bet.

Nowadays, however, instead of hunting for new species, it is more to the point to try to keep the species we already know from being exterminated, as many are in danger of being.

Why do such cults and their dogmas survive endless exposures, discrediting, and confutations? What gives them; the regenerative powers of the Lernaean Hydra, which grew two new heads for every one that Herakles knocked off?

Well, men have always had a voracious appetite for tall tales of colorful, exciting wonders. They accept them and pass them along, often with embellishments, because it is: fun. Nearly all histories, before modern times, were full of marvels. Thus the skeptical Roman historian Titus Livius collected hundreds of stories of portents. During Hannibal's invasion of Italy, he wrote:

... many portents occurred in Rome or in the neighborhood, or at all events, many were reported and easily gained credence, for when men's minds have been excited by superstitious fears they easily believe these things. A six-month-old child, of freeborn parents, is said to have shouted "Io Triumphe" in the vegetable market, whilst in the Forum Boarum, an ox is reported to have climbed up of its own

accord to the third story of a house, and then, frightened by the noisy crowd which gathered, it threw itself down. A phantom navy was seen shining in the sky; the temple of Hope in the vegetable =

market was struck by lightning; at Lanuvium Juno's spear moved of itself, and a crow had flown down to the temple and settled on her couch; in the territory of Amitemum beings in human shape and clothed in white were seen at a distance.[the Annals of the Roman People XXI xlii, 1]

Some of these events may have been natural, if unusual. But to show how these things grow, Livy gave a later list, in which the child spoke in its mother's womb, the ox talked in a human voice, and the beings in white stood around an altar in the sky.

For a later example, the thirteenth-century Icelandic Njal's Saga tells how, before the battle of Clontarf in 1014, which enabled the Irish to throw the Vikings out of Ireland, on three successive nights, one of the Norse contingents suffered first a rain of blood from the sky, then the men's own weapons leaped into the air and attacked them, and finally they were assailed by flocks of fierce ravens. One could go on like this all day.

Another factor in the ebullient recent growth of pseudoscience is the weakening of traditional religions as sources of facts about man and the universe. As science advances, it finds the true explanations for many questions that have long puzzled men. These explanations often contradict those given in the sacred books.

Thus the authors of the Bible obviously believed the world to be flat, but it's round. We are not descended from Adam and Eve but from a hairy ground-ape living in Africa twenty million years ago. Plagues are not sent by God to punish disobedient peoples but are caused by bacterial infections. Hence the traditional religions are less and less relied upon for material facts. Increasingly, they have been relegated to being teachers of morals and social-service organizations.

This decline has left a blank in the human psyche. Efforts to substitute some secular philosophy, such as Stoicism, Confucianism, or Marxism, for religion, as a guide and comforter to sinful man, have not been spectacularly successful. Science does not offer a very comforting substitute. It is the best way of finding out what is what, but it makes men neither better nor worse; and the impersonal universe it reveals is bleakly indifferent to human hopes and desires.

Further, by its very nature, science becomes more complex, specialized, and difficult as time goes on. It thus

becomes progressively harder for an ordinary mind to keep abreast of scientific discovery. Pseudoscientific cults, on the other hand, give the believer the feeling of being in the "modern" scientific swim, or of knowing things hidden from the unenlightened mass, without compelling him to master anything really hard.

Furthermore, the ease of transportation and communication has fostered the multiplication of cults. When people were more closely tied to their birthplaces, their kin, and the social milieu into which they were born, they were compelled to associate with a variety of people, many of them uncongenial, with

whom they were connected by accidents of birth or geography. But at least they had to face other viewpoints, and obvious foolishness was hooted down.

Of course, new ideas that turned out to be right were also hooted down. With the dizzy speed of change in the present day world, however, many people have developed minds that are not merely open but gaping. They swallow any new idea, no matter how fantastic, if it is forcefully presented by a charismatic leader.

Also, more and more find it possible, by easy travel and communication, to confine their social lives to those who share their own outlooks and prejudices. Wherever they go, they seek out others of their own peculiar views, since most folk prefer having their existing beliefs confirmed to having them refuted. In such a limited milieu, the most bizarre ideas can be solemnly embraced, because the cultists, seeing only one another outside of working hours, are never forced to consider other points of view. Hence a leader, if he can isolate his followers long enough, can convince them that the moon is made of green cheese. Since they never hear him contradicted, they believe it indefinitely.

Thus contemporary society tends to become more and more subdivided into small, exclusive, mentally self-isolated groups. Each has its own version of the True Faith and never listens to any other.

What can be done about this? Something, but not a great deal. If one is in academe, one can drill one's students in the criteria for judging a statement, as Instructor Broman did at

the University of Denver. He seems to have made it work; at least, his students were not fooled by Newton's tale. One can warn one's students against the stigmata of the charlatan:

arrogance, garrulity, appeals to emotion, authoritarianism, incomprehensible language, conviction of his own grandeur and persecution, and certainty that those who reject his ideas are scoundrels or madmen.

Few, however, seem able to examine new ideas with the calm, evenhanded intelligence, and the unemotional balance of receptivity and skepticism, needed correctly to evaluate such ideas every time. Pseudoscientific cultism, therefore, seems destined for a long and prosperous career.

Its endurance would be assured, if by nothing else, by the fact that there is money in it. Donald Menzel wrote a book effectively debunking flying saucers, and more recently Lawrence Kusche has published one debunking the Bermuda Triangle. You may be sure that the sales of these books have been only a tiny fraction of the sales of books promoting the original vagaries. If I undertook a thorough analysis of one of von Daniken's books, the result would be a book several times the size of the original. It would take years of my time; and if I were mad enough to write it, who would then read it?

Nor should we expect help from the government. When the government gets into such a dispute, its weight is thrown to the beliefs of its leaders, and they can be as wrong as anyone else. Governmental intervention resulted in the compulsory Aryanism of Hitler's Germany and the rule of Lysenko's pseudogenetics in Stalin's Russia. In the United States, the Fundamentalist crusade of the 1920s, led by the eminent William Jennings Bryan, sought a constitutional amendment against the teaching of evolution. Luckily, that effort petered out. In recent years, however, it has been revived, especially in California. There it had the blessing of the then governor Ronald Reagan. Goodness knows what might happen if a real, red-hot Fundamentalist were to become President of the United States.

Still, this is no reason for not knocking a head off this particular hydra whenever we can. The



scientific debunker's job may be compared to that of the trash collector. The fact that the garbage truck comes by today does not mean that there won't be another load tomorrow. But if the garbage were not collected at all, the results would be worse, as some cities have found when the sanitation workers struck.

So let us do our best to get rid of this ideological garbage, lest it inundate the earth. Our work will never be decisive,

since old cults are almost unkillable and new ones keep springing up; but that is no reason for not doing what we can. If we can save even a few from the lure of the higher nonsense, our efforts will have been worthwhile.

To close on a lighter note, I dabble in light verse and have composed a jingle called "The Little Green Men." It runs like this:

Ah, little green fellows from Venus

Or some other planet afar:

From Mars or Calypso or, maybe,

A world of an alien star!

According to best-selling authors-

Blavatsky to von Daniken -

They taught us the skills that were needed

To make super-apes into men.

They guided our faltering footsteps

From savagery into the dawns

Of burgeoning civilization

With cities and writing and bronze.

By them were the Pyramids builded;

They reared the first temples in Hind;  
Drew lines at Peruvian Nazca  
To uplift the poor Amerind .

With all of these wonders they gave us  
It's sad these divine astronauts  
Revealed not the answers to questions  
That foil our most rational thoughts.

Such puzzles as riches and paupers,  
The problems of peace and of war,  
Relations between the two sexes,  
Or crime and chastisement therefore.

So when we feel dim and defeated  
By problems immune to attack,  
Let's send out a prayer electronic  
"O little green fellows, come back!"