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Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons

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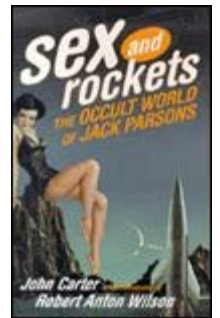
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Book Review:

Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons

By John Carter (Feral House, 1999)

The first in-depth look at the life of John Whiteside Parsons--pioneering rocket scientist, and ardent disciple of the notorious magus, Aleister Crowley--is finally available courtesy of Feral House in Sex and Rockets by John Carter. The release of this book, in my opinion, is an event long overdue, as I see in Parsons one of the most fascinating and important figures of the late 20th century; a man of great promise, who somehow fell short of his staggering potential. What makes this book all the more fascinating is the shift in focus that takes place throughout, as the author demarcates between "John Parsons" the brilliant rocket engineer, and "Jack Parsons" the failed magician, who in his attempt to cross the Abyss, fell into it instead, fulfilling a fiery destiny, which Parsons himself prophesied. Parsons, in many ways, possessed two separate selves--rocket scientist and magician--and this literary device is used throughout Sex and Rockets to illustrate the many contradictions that personified the life of a truly gifted, though equally flawed human being.



For those not in the know, Jack Parsons was a founding member of Jet Propulsion Laboratories (JPL) back in the late 30's, and one time head of the California branch of the magical order the Agape Lodge of the **Ordo Templi Orientalis (O.T.O.)**. Parson's infamous reputation was fueled by several nefarious undertakings and associations, notwithstanding his alliance with the self-proclaimed "Wickedest Man Alive!"--Aleister Crowley--who directed O.T.O. operations from his base in England.

Another of Parsons' claims to infamy was the mansion he owned at 1003 S. Orange Grove Ave. in Pasadena, CA, which hosted a menagerie of bohemians and other assorted social outcasts of the day, as well as serving as O.T.O. Headquarters. From there, rumors of drug intoxicated orgies and black magic ritual sacrifices abounded, not to mention tales of pregnant women dancing naked through hoops of ceremonial fire, and of innocent children being buggered by black robed brutes, under the aegis of occult forces. Although these legends continue to persist, police reports from the period suggest that the LAPD did not take any the allegations seriously, as documented in Sex and Rockets.

Going back to the original documents, Carter outlines Parsons' numerous technical achievements, and his key role in the pre-NASA development of space technology. This, in itself, makes Sex and Rockets an invaluable resource for those interested in a broader historical perspective of John Whiteside Parsons. Starting in late 30's, Parsons was an early pioneer in Rocket Engineering, a member of a group funded by the Guggenheim Aeronautical Laboratory, California Institute of Technology (GALCIT), which later evolved into JPL. This group's contribution to the war effort--as Carter points out--cannot be overlooked; nor can their early efforts in rocket engineering, which provided much of the impetus for later NASA projects in the late 50's and 60's, and the eventual landing of men on the moon.

Although Parsons has been memorialized by his peers with a statue at JPL--as well as the singular distinction of having a crater on the moon named after him (on the dark side, no less)-- he still remains an obscure figure in the halls of academia. (In a recent discussion with an aeronautical engineer, I mentioned the name 'Jack Parsons', and he had no clue as to whom I was referring!)

In *Sex and Rockets*, Carter brings a measure of much needed clarity to the life and times of the enigmatic Parsons; an enigma that has been compounded over the years by varying degrees of misinformation and exaggeration as to just who Parsons was, and exactly what he was trying to accomplish with the Babalon Working rituals, performed in part with L. Ron Hubbard, the future founder of Scientology. The end result of the Babalon Working was to birth an elemental being; a 'Moonchild' that--as Crowley stated in his *Book of the Law*--would be "mightier than all the kings of the Earth."

According to Thelemic legend, in 1918 Aleister Crowley came into contact with a interdimensional entity named Lam, who by the way is a dead ringer for the popular conception of the 'alien grey' depicted on the cover of Whitley Strieber's *Communion*. From this purported encounter, some have inferred that the industrious Mr. Crowley intentionally opened a portal of entry--through the practice of a magick ritual, The Amalantrah Working--which allowed the likes of Lam and other 'alien greys' a passageway onto the Earth plane. Furthermore, this portal may have been further enlarged by Parsons and Hubbard in 1946 with the commencement of the Babalon Working, thus facilitating a monumental paradigm shift in human consciousness.

In *Sex and Rockets*, Carter quotes Crowley successor Kenneth Grant, who wrote, "The [Babalon] Working began...just prior to the wave of unexplained aerial phenomena now recalled as the 'Great Flying Saucer Flap'. Parsons opened a door and something flew in." Carter also suggests it might have been the atomic bomb that opened this door between dimensions. He then further illustrates the importance of the year 1947, which ended the first stage of the Babalon Working, as Parsons and Hubbard parted ways amid a cloud of turmoil. 1947 was the year that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. In that very same year, Israel became a nation state, the transistor was invented and the sound barrier broken. Last, but certainly not least, the Modern Age of UFO's flew into view with the Kenneth Arnold sightings, followed not long after by the alleged saucer crash in Roswell, New Mexico. 1947 was also the year the Great Beast, Aleister Crowley died.

As history instructs, Parson's stormy life ended with a monumental bang when--on June 17, 1952--he accidentally blew himself to smithereens while working with powerful explosives. Some suggest that the explosion in question was no accident at all, and that foul play was involved. This is just one of the theories that Carter examines in *Sex and Rockets*, including the more bizarre scenario proffered by Michael Anthony Hoffman II, who contends that Parsons was attempting to conjure into existence an elemental being by way of an 'homunculus' experiment--an experiment that apparently backfired. While I find this theory--attributed to Parson's fiery demise--a bit difficult to swallow (much like Aleister Crowley's semen-filled 'longevity pills'), it nevertheless makes for some fascinating fodder.

Also of note is the wonderful introduction to *Sex and Rockets* by Robert Anton Wilson, no novice himself to the occult world of Jack Parsons. For years Wilson has kicked around the idea of writing the definitive biography of Aleister Crowley, as all previous endeavors in this area--in Wilson's estimation--have fallen far short in arriving at an accurate picture of Crowley, separating the real man from his monstrous myth.

To the contrary, *Sex and Rockets* is probably just the sort of biography that Wilson has envisioned for Crowley; a work stripped of myths and misconceptions, bolstered by hard research and detailed analysis of the life and times of a rising star that burnt out fast, who--in his descent--left behind a colorful trail for future generations to ponder.

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