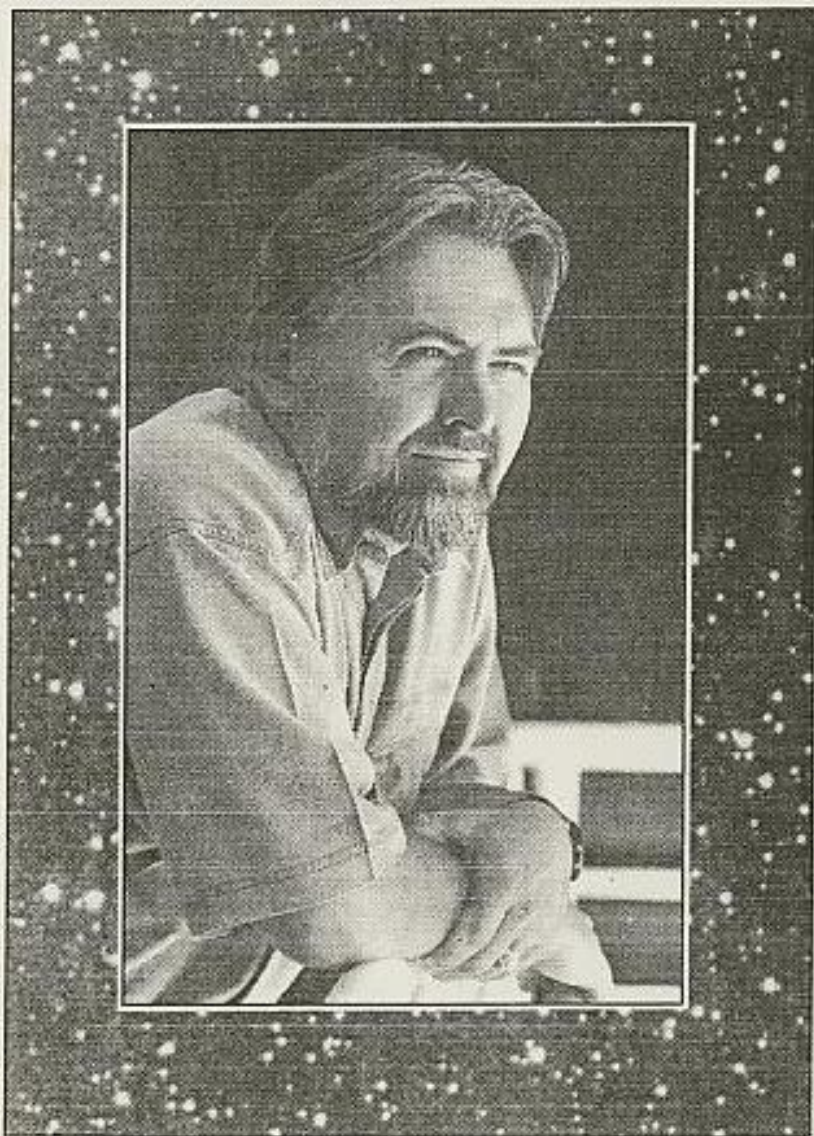


June 2, 1991

ACCENT



CLIFF GRASSMICK / Daily Camera

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: Terry Kruger started reading about Urantia as a young Vietnam veteran, questioning a spiritual universe and his role in it.

W H O
O W N S
T H E
W O R D



RESTRICTION REACTION: Terry Kruger thinks those interested in Urantia should get the word out, and around the rest of the world.



CLIFF GRASSMICK / Daily Camera

WARRIORS: Terry Kruger started reading about Vietnam veterans, questioning a spiritu-

WHO OWNS THE WORD



Camera file photo

RESTRICTION REACTION: Local entrepreneur John Hay thinks those interested in Urantia will be creative in getting the word out, and around the restrictions of the Urantia Foundation.

Distribution — not belief — divides Urantia readers

By HANS BJORDAHL
For the Camera

Terry Kruger was 21 years old, and had just come back from Vietnam.

"I was intellectually, spiritually, in turmoil," he says. "I was looking for answers to life. I began to question everything. 'Why am I here?'" Enrolled at Illinois State University, he became interested in art as a means of finding answers. "I began to ask myself, 'What is art?'" he says.

Then Kruger was introduced to the Urantia Book by a friend. The book, he was told, had been authored by celestial beings, and had inspired people to the point of creating a spiritual movement in its wake.

"I said, 'Yeah, right,'" he says.

But he picked up the book. And he opened it to a passage which he can recite to this day: "The high mission of any art is, by its illusions, to foreshadow a higher universe reality, to crystallize the emotions of time into the thought of eternity."

"I said, 'Far out!'"

After that, Kruger was up for three straight days doing a painting, reading the book and experiencing "the buzz of my life." His friends were initially skeptical, and, after the initial rush wore off, Kruger too became skeptical.

"I took courses to try and disprove it," he says, "but I could never abandon the fact that my spiritual experiences

were genuine."

Don Green was also skeptical at first, and, unlike Kruger, he was not seeking spiritual fulfillment. "I was a very angry agnostic at the time," he says. "I got into it to prove it wrong."

Leafing through the text, he says he stopped at a section on Adam and Eve "with a loud chuckle. I thought, 'Aha! Moth-

er Goose!'" Then he read it. "It just blew me away."

In the beginning

In 1911, a Chicago doctor named William Sadler discovered a man who was experiencing "states" from which it was impossible to arouse him. In these trances, the man spoke in voices that

claimed to be extraterrestrial. Sadler, a professional skeptic involved in debunking psychics, was nonetheless eventually convinced. He had every word of the man said recorded. The "Urantia Papers" spawned the Urantia Book, finished in 1931 and published in 1955. The man's identity remains secret to this day, a move designed to prevent "cultism" from forming around

The five revelations of Urantia

The Urantia Book details five "epochal revelations," the turning points in Urantia's (Earth's) history. The first of these two revelations went awry, according to the text, leaving the planet's residents spiritually stunted. These are the revelations:

■ 1. The Dalamatian Teachings. Caligastia, an area planetary prince, appointed 100 corporeal staff to teach Earth's residents the arts of civilization. The project went awry when "assistant sovereign" Lucifer delivered a proclamation of rebellion against the universe's hierarchy.

■ 2. The Edenic Teachings. The celestial beings Adam and Eve took on material bodies and were introduced to the planet. Their mission: biologically uplift the evolving races through their children. The project went awry when a semi-mortal named Cano convinced Eve that if they had an offspring, the mission would be enhanced. The encounter, however, led to punitive action from higher celestial powers, and in the chaos that followed, war broke out.

■ 3. Melchizedek. This celestial being was sent here

as an "emergency son" to try and keep the "light of truth" from being extinguished completely. He sent out many missionaries, who taught that faith was the act by which people earned God's favor, and laid the theological groundwork existent at the beginning of the fourth revelation.

■ 4. Jesus. A celestial "creator-son" who, searching for a planet to experience some form of "human bestowal," choose Earth from over 10,000 worlds. Love and service were the cornerstones of his teachings.

■ 5. The Urantia Book. The effects of this revelation have yet to be fully seen.

Copies of the Urantia Book may be lurking in the shadows of area bookstores, but it is becoming increasingly harder to find. The Jesusonian Foundation, 1790 30th St., Suite 400, has a limited amount of books for sale. The Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Ill., 60614, also sells some books on an individual basis.

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an individual whom Urantians firmly believe was merely a conduit.

Authorship of this 2,000-page compilation is claimed by a wide variety of celestial beings. The book contains a description of the universe, a history of the planet and a chronicle of the life of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, many characters from the Bible appear in the Urantia volume. Christ is the central figure in the book, and, according to Urantians, was a "creator son" who created Urantia (as Earth is termed) as one of his "projects." According to the doctrine, Christ was only one of five "epochally significant revelations" designed to give humans a gentle push along the evolutionary scale.

"It's a continuance, the next step from Christianity," says John Hay, local entrepreneur and Urantia reader.

Indeed, the Bible and the Urantia book have so much in common that a publication called the Parimony serves as a cross-reference between the two texts. The main difference, however, is obvious.

The Urantia Book approaches events from a much wider perspective, in which Earth is (See URANTIA, Page 7C)

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Urantia movement draws followers from many ba

(From Page 5C)

just one of 7 trillion inhabited worlds in the universe. These worlds are grouped into seven inhabited "super-universes," and each group of 10 million worlds is a "project" guided by a "creator-son" such as Christ. The whole package revolves around the stationary "Havona," where the "universal father" is said to live.

The Urantia universe

Such cosmological descriptions are, if nothing else, fascinating to consider. The universe is described as a huge elliptical disc, respirating in 2-billion-year cycles. "The book claims to know much that science has yet to learn," says Kruger, 43, now a graphics illustrator for the Boulder Police Department.

The Urantia Book's fearless recognition of scientific principles, discovered or undiscovered, draws many who are critical of such theories as "creation science." "The Urantia Book synthesizes philosophy, science and religion," says Don Green,

50. "The third section of the book is a history of the globe from formation to the presence of life. I studied that particular section for years, and it dovetails (with scientific fact) magnificently."

Kruger agrees. "It contains much information that can be verified on a number of levels," he says.

Despite the Urantia Book's unorthodox perspective, the spiritual philosophy is surprisingly familiar. The doctrine is monotheistic. Each individual carries a piece of the divine with him or her, a "spiritual spark," as Kruger puts it. The purpose of finite beings, such as humans, is to evolve toward becoming celestial beings, to merge with their divine spark. Death is viewed as a transformation, rather than an end. "And death," notes Kruger, "is a big concern for a lot of people."

In short, the core of the Urantia philosophy closely shadows accepted dogma: There is a single creator, and every being is thus a spiritual sibling. The ma-

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ior difference is that the Urantia book cares to account for every being in the universe.

But while the Urantia movement may look like a religion, smell like a religion and feel like a religion, it stops short of being a religion per se. "We're a loose brotherhood of readers," says Green. He refers to the book not as a religious document, but as a "celestial textbook." Instead of churches, there are study groups.

Belief in Boulder

And many of those study

groups are in Boulder, where the Urantia movement has gained a solid foothold. "Boulder has more (Urantia) readers per capita than any other city," says Hay, 45, founder of the Boulder biotech firm Cell Technologies. He attributes this convergence to the "religious" nature of the city. "Boulder promotes its religious variety," says Hay, "and it's very tolerant of all beliefs."

Both Kruger and Green say it was the Urantia movement that led them to move to Boulder. Green came in 1982 to attend Hay's Urantia School, offering 2½-year courses in the Urantia text. Hay, whose latest endeavor is a firm called Green Technologies, still holds study groups at his home on a regular basis.

In Boulder, other manifestations of Urantia abound. The Jesusonian Foundation, headed by Boulder businessman Mo Siegel, distributes both the Parimony and the Concordex, an index to the Urantia text. Urantia is one link between Siegel and Hay; the other is their business partnership that launched the Celestial Seasonings tea company.

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URANTIA®

Green is also a high-profile member of the movement, manning a booth in the student center at the University of Colorado. His table, adorned with copies of the Urantia Book and numerous pamphlets on the subject, is visited by curious passersby, other Urantia followers, atheists eager to debate, critical Christian fundamentalists and an occasional CU student. While he can "arrange for a sale" of the book, his objective in the student center is not sales. "I try to broaden awareness," he says. "It's important that people just see the book. Just by being here, I could possibly facilitate open-mindedness at some later date."

Kruger also takes an active role in the Urantia movement by publishing "Urantian Sojourn," which has a circulation of about 100. The magazine takes a critical look at the problems that have arisen in the movement.

Foundation restricts

Many Urantia readers have come into conflict with the Urantia Foundation in Chicago, which holds the rights to the Urantia Book. The problems stem from the foundation's decision to restrict distribution of the book. While only 200,000 books were ever printed, Kruger maintains that at least 23,000 sit idle in the foundation's basement, and the Urantia Book is becoming increasingly harder to find. That doesn't sit well with many readers who think that the book should be disseminated as widely as possible.

"They've turned it into a business," says Kruger. "They've taken the Urantia symbol (three concentric circles known as the "Paradise Trinity") and turned it into a corporate logo."

The foundation, guided by five board members with life terms, has come under fire for dissolv-

ing to Hay, members of the foundation simply have a "chosen people complex."

The foundation is reluctant to discuss the controversy, refusing to answer all but written inquiries on the subject. In response to the Camera's written questions, executive director Martin Myers replied, "it has been our long-standing policy to encourage only the quiet, person-to-person spread of the teachings of the Urantia Book." He declined to respond to specific questions, citing a reluctance to "work through the public press."

Diverse followers

Hay tries to look at the bright side. "People will just have to be more aggressive and creative in getting the word out," he says.

It is a word that, according to Urantia followers, is sorely needed. The book is direct in saying that Earth is a world gone awry. Two of Earth's five revelations apparently misfired, leaving the planet's residents spiritually stunted. The Urantia Book, the self-proclaimed fifth revelation, is designed to help patch things up, but the process is taking longer than expected. Though nearly 200,000 books are estimated to have been disseminated, there are only 7,000 known readers. Kruger maintains that many people who own the massive book don't read it, and many who do read it keep to themselves about it.

When readers do find each other, however, Kruger is always amazed at their diversity. Attending his first Urantia conference in 1974, he was surprised to see barefoot hippies sharing the room with cigar-smoking businessmen.

If one were to single out a defining characteristic among Urantia readers, it's that many of them are "spiritual refugees," disenfranchised from the religious doctrines they grew up with. Kruger maintains that they eventually find the Urantia Book because of its unique perspective.

"The whole approach is unprecedented," he says, "and when taken in totality, it's tough to deny that it's more than just a simple work of fiction."

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The foundation, guided by five board members with life terms, has come under fire for dissolving the "Brotherhood," a group of readers who set policy, when the group began to show independence. The foundation has even gone to such lengths to use its copyright to sue individuals who reproduce the book in order to disseminate it. One example is a woman in Tucson, Ariz., who copied the book onto a computer disk and made copies for her friends.

"The book is a revelation, not limited to any group or individual," says Green, "and to stand in the way of it is absurd." Ac-

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In the ever-competitive marketplace of ideals, the Urantia Book has carved itself a niche, lending strength to those who believe that the mere presence of the book on Earth lays the groundwork for serious planetary change. "The Earth," says Kruger, "is quivering on the brink of a spiritual renaissance."