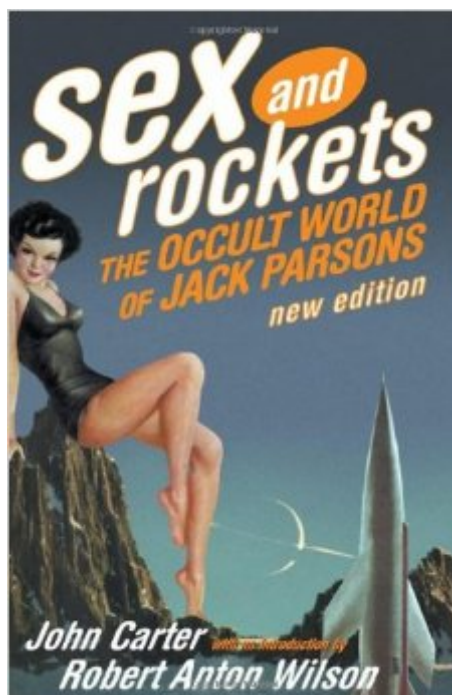


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Sex And Rockets: The Occult World Of Jack Parsons



Synopsis

This remarkable true story about the co-founder of Jet Propulsion Laboratory. By day, Parsonsâ™ unorthodox genius created a solid rocket fuel that helped the Allies win World War II. By night, Parsons called himself The Antichrist. âœOne of the best books of the year.â•â "The Anomalist

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Customer Reviews

Sex and Rockets, a new book from Feral House about Jack Parsons, is rich with previously undocumented biographical information about this fascinating and talented genius, whose scientific career is no less interesting than his career as an occult initiate. This literal "son of Captain Marvel" (Marvel H. Parsons) was himself given the name Marvel at birth. Later his mother began calling him John, and he came to be known as Jack by his friends. In general Carter's book seems pretty well-researched. I appreciate the fact that _Sex and Rockets_ focuses more on the subject of Jack and his life than earlier literary efforts which have exploited the mythos surrounding Jack and his infamous Babalon Working to propagate highly speculative, only vaguely and loosely associated fringe agendas on the part of various writers. Carter has done a good job sticking to the subject. The research in _Sex and Rockets_ focuses primarily on Jack's scientific career and secondarily on the Babalon Working itself. Of the former, the author traces a clear path detailing, validating and celebrating Parsons' contributions to the field of rocket fuel technology. Carter succeeds in his mission to carefully excavate and restore the previously almost-buried name and contributions of this scientist to their rightful stature in history. Of the latter, the author draws a clear juxtaposition

between Cameron's view of the Babalon Working and Jack's own understanding. Carter clearly pinpoints the persistent indications in Jack's own records that reveal Jack's personal expectations of something more along the lines of an apotheosis than an actual incarnation, despite repeated communications from the Babalon archetype, also faithfully recorded, to redirect Jack's focus to the true nature of the Working, as time and again She gently deflects Jack's attention away from concerning himself with the future vehicle of Her manifestation. Carter also engages in some excellent reconstructive work about portions of the Working on which Jack's record is scant. While I do not agree with all Carter's conclusions or his particular slant on the Working at times, the Babalon Working remains a subject of myriad interpretations. Carter succeeds in his attempt to provide a more objective portrayal of the Working, and as such, his rings closer to true than other more fanciful and "fringe" speculations upon it have done in the past. One thing I did not like about this book was the conspicuous absence of source citation. There were many interesting pieces of biographical information for which the author consistently failed to provide citation, neglecting to indicate whether he obtained the information from documents, records, conversations or interviews with people connected to Jack, etc. Comments by Cameron and others are recorded without so much as supplying the context in which they were made, when they were made, or to whom. Information about Jack's life which was not previously documented or heretofore known to the public is written as fact without offering any outside verification thereof. For example, Carter writes about a brief period of time where Jack's scientific career had stalled and Jack had taken an interim job at a filling station. Yet there is no source cited for this information. Whether the author obtained it from employment records, interviews with others connected with Jack's estate, or elsewhere remains a mystery, and the reader is left having to take the author's word with no means to verify it for himself. True, not every bit of information needs to be footnoted, and there is a lot of previously documented information about Jack's career. Nevertheless, previously undocumented and/or unpublished information should always be cited to verify its authenticity. Instead, the majority of existing citations in this book consist of things previously well-documented and cited elsewhere on numerous occasions, such as references to Crowley's writings and letters or O.T.O. ritual. As a researcher, I find this frustrating, because without due citation for biographical information that is not documented elsewhere, how can *_Sex and Rockets_* be regarded or used bibliographically as an authoritative source? The intelligent reader needs to see things historically documented or at least reasonably verified via citation, particularly where statements are attributed to other parties. This lack of documentation is definitely this book's biggest weakness. The author clearly did extensive and worthwhile research, so the lack of source citation is both puzzling and devaluing to the book as

a whole. Fair warning: there's one paragraph in the chapter "Death and Beyond" which brings up a very nasty bit of recent hearsay without duly informing the reader that the item in question is, in fact, unsubstantiated hearsay and that no physical evidence has been produced to substantiate it. Unless either the sources of the rumor, the author himself, or the publishers can produce the physical evidence claimed, or at least a sufficiently clear disclaimer as to its hearsay nature, repetition of this claim is inexcusably irresponsible, especially considering this book is the first reasonably thorough biographical work about Jack to be published. It smacks of crass sensationalism, which is totally unnecessary in exploring the life of a colorful and diversely talented person like Jack. I say produce the physical evidence or retract the rumor -- or at least amend the paragraph to clearly point out that it is nothing but hearsay and that no physical evidence to support the claim has been produced. Anything less is just plain exploitive, more worthy of the "Jerry Springer show" than an otherwise fairly well-researched biography. Despite these two serious complaints, I still recommend this book as a ground-breaking, definitive biographical work on Jack Parsons. TIME IS ... for it to be read. Shedona Chevalier (Soror M.'P.'B.') Master, Living Flame Camp, O.T.O.

Formulated by British humorist Stephen Potter circa 1950, the doctrine of one-upmanship states quite simply that it is the business of every intelligent man, no matter what situation he finds himself in, to be "one up" on the other chap. It is a philosophy that Jack Parsons, who died some two years later, would have benefited immensely by adopting. For a brilliant scientist Parsons was capable of remarkable naivete and as Gerald Suster delicately puts it, often had ideas "in excess of his ability to deal with them." In addition to being a rotten judge of character he wasn't conspicuously overburdened with common sense and had a knack amounting almost to genius for placing himself "one down" in relation to what Aleister Crowley called "our Brethren in California." Chief among these "Brethren in California" was of course Scientology founder Lafayette Ron Hubbard, who bamboozled Parsons with a series of "inspired" messages relating to the incarnation of Babalon, which he claimed to receive straight from the horse's mouth. Nowadays most sensible people associate Hubbard with the other end of the horse, but in the early Forties he was still an unknown quantity and seemingly had no trouble in swindling Parsons out of his money, his wife and his credibility in Crowley's eyes. ("It is the ordinary confidence trick.") Parsons was a potent but wildly erratic writer whose surviving material veers from elegiac beauty to surpassing daftness. If any constant can be traced through his work, good, bad or indifferent, it is that of schoolboy rebellion against "all authority not based on courage and manhood." Among other qualities, he shared with

Crowley a conviction that "the key of joy is disobedience," and "conjured up" Marjorie Cameron to help him live it to the full. "I have my elemental," he exulted in February 1946, taking a characteristically rose-colored view of a magical operation which, while it was undoubtedly successful, ultimately proved to be a two-edged sword. For magical purposes Cameron chose to call herself Candida, the name of a parasitic fungal infection more commonly known as thrush. With her help Parsons attempted to conceive a Moonchild, thus provoking Crowley's ire ("I get fairly frantic when I contemplate the idiocy of these louts") and effectively sealing his own fate. From then on the die was cast. In 1948 Parsons had an attack of the existential heebie jeebies and restyled himself Belarion Armillus Al Dajjal AntiChrist. Further bizarre events followed in rapid succession until, ripped off, conned and cuckolded by all and sundry, he blew himself to smithereens with fulminate of mercury. His death was neither murder (as some authors have rather fancifully suggested) nor a magical ricochet effect, but merely the natural culmination of a life dogged by disaster. Parsons has been profiled in several recent books, notably *Montauk Revisited* by Preston Nichols and Peter Moon, a turgid 250-page validation of John Grant's dictum that most occult potboilers are written by the gullible for the gullible. Now comes John Carter's full-length biography, which gathers together arcana from a wide variety of sources and binds them into a coherent whole. The text doesn't pretend to be definitive but nevertheless manages to cast fresh light on Parsons' methods, motives and manias. Particularly intriguing is its account of SF author Jack Williamson's peripheral influence on the so-called Babalon Working. Readers are also provided with several fascinating neuro-cameos of artist maudit Marjorie Cameron, whose red hair and natural sensuality made her ideal Scarlet Woman material. Cameron was in many respects a far more interesting figure than Parsons himself - but that's another story. These and other subjects are combined into a fast-moving, ever-changing word-portrait of human eccentricity. Parsons finally emerges as an occultist who, for all the scientific acumen attributed to him, would have blithely fallen for the three-card trick. Above all his life resembles a cautionary tale with the motto: "Don't dabble in the unknown." Perhaps that is the best way to view it.

What a frustrating book An incredibly fascinating set of locales, ideas and characters: magick, rockets, early sci fi utopian dreamers, and a writing style that manages to make it all about as interesting as a history of, say, the ball-bearing industry. The book truly comes across as someone's notes for a book they never quite got around to writing. NOTHING comes to life in it; there is no vitality in any of the descriptions, no attempt to make any kind of meaning out of the details of Parsons' life. R.A. Wilson's lively intro only makes you realize how flat and colorless the rest of the

book is. Still, for a glimpse into a world that begs for better documentation, this is worthwhile reading. Where else can you get a straightforward account of L. Ron Hubbard as a wife-stealing conman? Sex-magick Crowleyites in 1940s suburbia? Frontiers of science, magick, and social experimentation, all happening at the same time and the same place? Worthwhile as a map, but not much fun as a journey . . .

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