

Chariots of the Gods: Unsolved Mysteries of the Past Study Guide

**Chariots of the Gods: Unsolved Mysteries of the Past
by Erich von Däniken**

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Plot Summary

Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods* offers the controversial hypothesis that primitive mankind was visited by extraterrestrial alien astronauts who provided early humans laws, technology, and knowledge. These strange spacemen were revered as "gods" by the primitives, and as a result, much primitive art, masonry, and texts depict and reflect upon this visitation.

Using this hypothesis as a touchstone, Von Däniken systematically explores questions and unexplained circumstances in archaeology primarily, but also in biology, ancient literature, exobiology (the study of alien life) and astronomy. From the Mayan calendar's uncanny astronomical accuracy, to the ancient maps of Piri Reis, which appear to have been charted from an impossible height, to huge stone monuments that even modern-day construction equipment could not move, to seeming impossibilities in the construction of the Egyptian pyramids, and to batteries and platinum flying in the face of the limits of primitive technology, Von Däniken takes the reader on a trip around antiquity, offering explanations for these facts in light of his alien astronauts theory.

The author also spends much of the book offering interpretations of passages in ancient literature in light of his hypothesis. The first book of the Bible, Genesis, for example, speaks of "sons of God" who were giant in size. This and a multitude of "giants" being mentioned in nearly every culture's mythology lead Von Däniken to suspect these "giants" were in fact alien astronauts who interbred with the human species to initiate civilization. Similarly, Von Däniken veers from tradition when he interprets the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a nuclear explosion and the biblical Flood as an experiment in "selective breeding" by aliens attempting to perfect the human race. Von Däniken offers interpretations for other texts, like the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh and the Indian epic Mahabharata, all fitting his hypothesis of ancient space travelers.

Von Däniken takes particular care in exploring remaining questions about ancient buildings. Heavy skepticism is lent to the notion that the Egyptians built their fabulous pyramids with only slaves and existing craftsmen. Lack of trees for wooden rollers and the extraordinarily precise joining of stones are but two features of the pyramids' construction that has the author looking skyward for the "true" architects.

Throughout, Von Däniken urges the scientific community to shed its prejudice and become open to the possibility of an ancient astronaut visit, at which point the author believes true scientific inquiry and research can replace worn-out and erroneous assumptions about ancient cultures, arts, and texts. The author also urges mankind to continue its exploration of space because perceived overpopulation, food shortages, energy shortages, and the eventuality of a catastrophic or cosmic event (such as the Sun dying) all point to the need to inhabit another planet or planets if mankind as a species is to survive.



Introduction and Chapter 1

Introduction and Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Introduction - Erich von Däniken warns that the theories and conjectures he puts forth in the book fly in the face of hundreds of years of traditional archaeology, and that it will take a brave reader willing to put aside his or her prejudices and preconceptions in order to appreciate the ideas contained in the book. Von Däniken's central and controversial assertion is that extraterrestrial astronauts visited humankind at its nascency, and that these astronauts were considered gods by primitive Man.

Chapter 1 - Von Däniken poses the question, "Are there intelligent beings in the cosmos?" He then proceeds to provide some evidence to answer this question in the positive. Given the vast number of stars and planets seen by modern telescopes, von Däniken asserts that even with a very conservative estimate, we can assume that 100 million planets in space may be able to sustain life. Furthermore, since conditions for life develop more quickly on some planets than others, the reader can safely assume that many of these 100 million life-sustaining planets may have life with civilizations more advanced than our own, including the ability to travel long distances in space, an ability humankind had begun to explore at the time of the first printing of this book (1968).

Von Däniken also wishes to dismiss the long-held assumption that Earth is unique among the cosmos, and that it has just the right conditions for life, such as an ideal temperature, the existence of water, and so forth. Von Däniken points to recent research showing that, even on Earth, there are organisms like bacteria that can exist without water, in extreme temperatures, or in atmospheres wholly unlike our own. It is naïve to believe that the only life in the universe is happening on Earth, in a relatively tiny sliver of time. It is time for laymen and scientists alike to shed old preconceptions, as outdated ideas like "the Sun revolves around the Earth" were previously shed, and embrace the reality of life on other planets.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2 - The author peers into a hypothetical near future, in which humans launch an ocean-liner-sized rocketship toward a distant planet. This rocket, due to photon propulsion, is able to travel up to 99% the speed of light. It arrives at a planet with conditions similar to Earth. The rocket has exhausted its fuel, thus the crew must land and find "fissionable material" from which to create fuel. Once landed, they encounter humanoid "semi-savages" (very much like our own ancestors), who can only explain these strange visitors and their seemingly miraculous vehicles and powers as "gods." The author further foresees that the rocketship crew teaches the semi-savages rudimentary tenets of civilization and agriculture. The crew attempts to explain that they are not gods but only an advanced civilization, but this is far beyond the comprehension of the simple semi-savage, and he maintains they must be gods. The crew leaves eventually, leaving behind traces of their visit that the semi-savages hold dear as holy relics.

This scenario is precisely the scenario the author sees in our own past.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 - The author cites several examples of ancient accomplishments and phenomenon he asserts would not have been possible without the supposed astronaut gods' existence. The ancient maps of Turkish Admiral and cartographer Piri Reis are discussed. These maps are extraordinarily accurate, an accuracy thought impossible given the technology available at the time. Moreover, some argue they depict America and regions of Antarctica that would not be explored until centuries later. Most interesting to Von Däniken is the fact that the Reis maps distort toward the edges, much like the image at the edge of a camera lens would do. Given this, the author asserts these ancient maps must have been the work of ancient astronauts capable of aerial photography.

The reader is next pointed to the famous "Nazca lines" in Peru. These lines and geometrical figures, to Von Däniken, resemble an ancient runway more than anything else, as if it were an invitation to the astronaut "gods" to land there. Von Däniken doubts the primitive Incas could have perfected such surveying techniques without help from aerial vehicles and technology.

Similarly, modern archaeology is at a loss to explain curiosities found at a site called Tiahuanaco. First, is an ancient calendar which is able to predict equinoxes, seasons, and moon positions to a highly accurate degree. Second, is a huge sandstone idol marked with complex symbols, which seem to correspond to astronomical realities at a time that would have been impossible for primitive peoples to comprehend much less record. Third, there are carvings which depict figures with strange helmets on and four fingers. Fourth, the famous "Gate of the Sun" depicts a flying god. And fifth, the very mythology of the ancient Tiahuanaco people describe a god-woman coming down to earth in a golden spaceship, with four webbed fingers, giving birth to Earth children and then flying away. He also notes the impossibility of primitive people being able to accomplish the rock vitrification (transformation to a glassy substance) at nearby Sacsahuaman, an Incan fortress. For Von Däniken, all of these facts point to the problematic reality of ancient astronauts that archaeology conveniently ignores.

Von Däniken continues this line of thought by examining ancient Sumeria. Like the Incans, their astronomical estimates about the moon are uncannily accurate. A calculation was found in Sumerian script with a final figure fifteen digits long. Considering the ancient Greeks' largest number was only five digits long, this is an incredibly large number for primitives to calculate. Sumerians also wrote of a string of kings that ruled them for thousands and thousands of years. Von Däniken theorizes these kings were in fact ancient astronauts, who "lived" so long only because they came and went in spaceships traveling near to the speed of light (thus time was experienced differently, astronauts versus Sumerians). A mixture of races, as this, could explain the



variance in figure and face depictions in ancient Sumerian sculpture, with some faces elongated or goggle-eyed.

The reader is then informed of several examples of primitive peoples accomplishing seemingly impossible achievements, given their level of technology. There have been items found made of aluminum (a difficult metal to achieve) and platinum, cut crystal lenses, electric dry batteries, extraordinarily fine fabric, etc. Von Däniken implores the scientific community to see with new eyes and re-examine some of these impossibilities in light of his theories. Von Däniken views contemporary narrow-mindedness as the same type of thinking that has limited scientific knowledge throughout mankind's history. Today's "impossible" is tomorrow's commonplace.

Lastly, Von Däniken points to numerous examples of "cave paintings" around the world. Many of these paintings depict bulky men with domes or other indefinable shapes for heads. Additionally, many heads in these paintings have spiral-like horns growing from them. Von Däniken asks that the world re-interpret these drawings not as clunky and unskilled primitive drawings of real people, but of more accurate representations of astronauts (with their bulky suits, domed heads, and antennae).



Chapter 4 and Chapter 5

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 - Von Däniken now looks to the Holy Bible for more evidence of his theory of ancient astronauts. In Genesis, it reads, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Von Däniken wonders why the plural was used and not the singular. Genesis also mentions "sons of God" who were giant in size. Many ancient texts speak of giants, and Von Däniken suggests these giants must have existed, and were probably visitors from another planet.

The author next dissects the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. That the angels who warn Lot appear to be "hurried" (what God would have to hurry?), and that Lot's wife fell dead at the sight, and some other physical descriptions of the incident, suggest to Von Däniken that this was actually a nuclear explosion similar to the bombs dropped in World War II.

Next Von Däniken points to a passage from the prophet Ezekiel. He describes gods coming down amid great noise and dust, among wheels that gleam and can turn while still moving. Much of the description of Ezekiel's eyewitness account compels Von Däniken to believe that what Ezekiel saw were astronauts in some all-terrain vehicle, like an amphibious helicopter, which could move without its wheels touching the ground. Similar accounts of "chariots on wheels" emitting smoke and lightning in the Dead Sea Scrolls provide more evidence.

Similarly, some portions of the account of Moses could be explained via Von Däniken's theory. In one passage, God warns Moses that no one must touch the Ark of the Covenant. But in fact Uzzah accidentally touches the Ark and is killed. The Ark for Von Däniken is easily explained as an electric transformer, whereby Uzzah was electrified. Going on, the author states that God being seen and not heard by Moses in the mountains is easily explained by our loudspeaker technology. For Von Däniken, God's frequent insistence that he not be viewed is evidence of ancient astronauts not wanting to spoil the ruse, so to speak.

Perhaps most interesting and telling for Von Däniken is the event of the Flood. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, Noah is described as wholly unlike his father Lamech. Lamech seeks advice for this troublesome reality and is told by Enoch that humankind is doomed to die in a Flood, and that Noah has been chosen to survive and regenerate the human race. For Von Däniken the episode of the Flood is but one example in ancient texts of the "gods" deliberately breeding and re-breeding humankind, like scientists breeding animals in order to arrive at the most desirable traits. Such breeding would not be the work of the omnipotent God humankind knows, who would simply make something so, and not go through such an arduous process.



Chapter 5 - The reader's attention is next turned to the Epic of Gilgamesh, a famous ancient text written in Akkadian and which can be traced back to Sumeria. In it, Gilgamesh is described as two-thirds "god" and one-third "man," and another man, Enkidu, is spoken of as animal-like, further speaking to the breeding Von Däniken found with the biblical Flood. Enkidu is described as being taken on a great journey through space, whereby his body felt like "lead." For Von Däniken, this can only mean the gravitational or "G" force at very high velocities, seemingly impossible to attain for a primitive civilization. On this space journey, Enkidu sees Earth from a great height, describing oceans as water troughs and Earth as looking like porridge. The author sees this as more evidence of astronauts.

Gilgamesh in the latter part of the epic travels a great journey to arrive at the "father of men," Utnapishtim. When he finally arrives, Utnapishtim relates a story almost exactly like the Flood in the Bible. Von Däniken speculates that the Bible's authors borrowed the story of the Flood and that the Sumerian Flood account is actually the genuine one. But Von Däniken laments that any opportunity to really examine the story's heritage, among many other inconsistencies in the Bible, are lost because of the sacredness of the Bible and the taboo involved in questioning its text. The world must open its eyes to "truth," and truth untainted by the prejudice of religious conviction, in order to judge facts. Von Däniken proposes a thought experiment whereby present-day civilization is destroyed by war, and then 500 years later space archaeologists find fragments of the Statue of Liberty. They may theorize that this was humanity's depiction of a Fire or Sun God (given its torch and rays streaming from its head), but in fact the explanation is much simpler and more secular.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 - Von Däniken expands into other cultures for more proof of his hypothesis. Eskimo legend speaks of "gods with brazen wings," and American Indians spoke of a "thunderbird" that introduced fire and fruit to them. Mayans, like the Incans, also had very accurate astronomical calendars, and like the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Sumerians, spoke of gods coming down from the stars.

The reader is then directed to the Mahabharata, an Indian epic that predates the Bible. This text speaks of "Vimanas" or flying vehicles that could cover vast distances and travel forward and upward. For Von Däniken this is an obvious description for an advanced spaceship. The Vimana is even described as accompanied by a "tremendous din" like the vehicle Ezekiel witnessed. Furthermore, the first book of the Mahabharata speaks of the unmarried Kunti, who had a son by a god who visited her, more evidence of astronauts breeding humans. Finally, there are passages describing weapons which cause frailty and one's hair to fall out, accompanied by white-hot smoke which could reduce cities to ash. These passages could be describing an "H-Bomb" such as the ones dropped on Japan in World War II.

Von Däniken next turns his attention to Egypt, where gods are nearly uniformly depicted with wings or as arriving or departing on chariots of fire or gleaming like the Sun. Von Däniken points to the ancient Egyptians' obsession with cyclical death and rebirth and immortality and the idea that gods will return to Earth after many, many years, as evidence that ancient astronauts did indeed make several visits to Earth.

Briefly mentioned, Nordic mythology also mentions flying vehicles, and Thor, king of the gods, is the "Thunderer," who by tradition makes skies unsafe.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 - Skepticism is expressed over the usual explanations for the construction of the Egyptian pyramids. Archaeologists explain that the pyramids were built over many years, with workers pulling large stone slabs with rope on rollers made of trees. Von Däniken has many problems with this account. First, the Nile Valley has such a small fertile area (only the banks of the Nile itself) that it could not possibly support the food needs of so many slaves and craftsmen. Second, the only wood that grows in the Nile Valley are palms, and Von Däniken supposes these palms could not have been used as rollers, as they provide nutritional dates to a starved population. Thus, wood would have had to be imported from elsewhere, but this would be next to impossible since the horse-and-cart was not seen in the region until about 1600 BC.

Von Däniken also points to the amazing mathematical aspects of the pyramids themselves. Meridians running through the pyramids divide continents and oceans into two exactly equal halves. The area of the base of the pyramid at Cheops, divided by two times its height, is exactly Pi. The pyramids are exactly level. Also, the pyramid at Cheops lies at the "center of gravity" of the continents. These facts, along with the uncanny craftsmanship of the structures (such that joinings of stone are accurate to the thousandth of an inch), compel Von Däniken to assert these massive undertakings were not merely at the whim of this or that human Pharaoh, but were projects commissioned by ancient astronauts, who provided the Egyptians with advanced technology to achieve them.

Egyptian mummification is next explored. Von Däniken wonders where did primitive, "heathen" Egyptians get the idea of rebirth and reawakening in the first place, and secondly, why the emphasis on preserving body tissue? Von Däniken fits mummification into his hypothesis of ancient space travelers by supposing that Egyptians were instructed by space travelers to preserve the bodies of important peoples until the space travelers return. At the time of the return, the space travelers would have such advanced medical technology (necessary for extraordinarily long space voyages, voyages that would normally outstrip lifespans) that they could literally resurrect the physical body using science. There are indeed some present-day anecdotes to support the notion of life coming back to preserved tissue, such as deep hibernation and some species of fish who freeze only to swim again once the waters thaw. To bolster this hypothesis, Von Däniken notes that many other parts of the world - China, Russia, Mongolia - show evidence of important peoples being deep-frozen in order to preserve the body.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 - Attention is now turned to Easter Island and its famous, massive statues, which present inexplicable questions similar to the Egyptian pyramids. The island could not have, food-wise, sustained the amount of workers it would need to produce the amount of statues it produced. How did they move the statues without wooden rollers (the volcanic island has no trees), and how did they hoist hats upon the heads of the figures, which were separate pieces of rock, if some statues reached as high as 66 feet?

There are a couple of other examples around the world as well, of huge statues and questions about how primitive peoples moved them. A 100-ton human head made by the Olmecs, for example, could not even be moved with modern construction equipment, but nonetheless the Olmecs managed to move it to a specific site. Von Däniken can only conclude that the people of antiquity had help with these statues, in the form of astronauts with advanced technology.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 - The ancient culture of the Mayans is examined. Von Däniken first notes that, like other cultures, the Mayan astronomical calendar was frighteningly accurate. Related to this, Mayans built steps to their temples in increments (such as one step every 52 years), to adhere to realities of their calendar. More intriguing is the great abandonment of the Mayan cities in 600 A.D., a mysterious event that left Mayan cities and temples completely empty and suddenly uninhabited. There are no signs of violence or of an outside culture forcibly taking over. Moreover, if there was some sort of revolution, one would expect at least some portion of the population to remain. Nothing seems to explain this event.

Von Däniken, invoking his hypothesis of the astronaut gods, suggests that the Mayans were told of a "second coming" by the astronauts with a specific year, and then the Mayans were given the technology of their calendar to mark as they grew closer to this year. Mayan mythology speaks of gods returning when vast buildings and temples were completed, and so Mayans worked on their buildings according to the calendar cycle. When the year (600 A.D.) came and went, the disillusioned people migrated and dispersed, their "gods" having failed them, and all their buildings made in vain.

A stone relief found in this abandoned patchwork of cities (referred to as the "Old Kingdom") shows the chief Mayan god, Kukumatz, in what Von Däniken claims is clearly a rocketship, with wavy lines like smoke emanating from its base, and Kukumatz seated sideways and hunched over what might be an instrument panel of a rocketship.

Similarly, like many other ancient cultures, the Mayans had an interest in the sky (they built an observatory) and an obsession with flight. Many figures in their art have wings. In fact, one of the major later gods, Quetzalcoatl, is a snake with wings. Legend tells that Quetzalcoatl taught the Mayans art, science, culture, and laws. After bestowing these gifts, Quetzalcoatl returned to the "morning star," promising to return to Earth someday. For Von Däniken, this is simply more evidence of extraterrestrial visits from alien astronauts.

In the final pages of the chapter, Von Däniken goes "around the world," mentioning oddities that defy easy explanation and in fact are best explained by his own theory of astronaut gods. These include remains of an airship in Russia, depictions of rocket-like machines in Kunming, China, and Hadjar el Guble in Lebanon, a huge stone monument that could not have possibly been moved by humans.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 - Von Däniken argues for the merits of space research. While many may consider costly outer space research a waste of money that would be better spent here on Earth, Von Däniken states several reasons why space research is not only valuable but crucial to mankind's future. First, Earth's population will soon outstrip its capacity to feed its inhabitants, forcing us to look skyward for both alternative food supplies and more room to live. Second, energy sources will, sooner rather than later, be exhausted on Earth, and we must look to Mars or elsewhere for additional fuel. Third there is the benefit of technological by-products of space research, such as Teflon, photoelectric cells, advances in medicine, advances in aircraft construction, etc. Lastly, it is simply our responsibility to the future of mankind to explore space because Earth will, in fact, be swallowed up by a dying Sun in the matter of millions of years.

UFOs, or Unidentified Flying Objects, is the next subject. Von Däniken admits he is in danger of indulging in "junk science" about which the scientific community at large is skeptical, but the author insists that, as many other examples in the book, this is an area full of questions and lacking decent answers. Von Däniken is willing to dismiss the majority of UFO sightings as the product of overactive imaginations or simply the misinterpretation of laymen who instead see weather balloons or earthly aircraft. Still, Von Däniken lists several instances in the 50s and 60s of meteorologists, pilots, and other professionals who would not misidentify a weather balloon or similar object, who yet saw UFOs they could not explain. Still more intriguing are scattered reports of "matter from the universe," in which extraterrestrial material (or intelligences) made physical contact with earth. Von Däniken describes various scientific expeditions to an area of Russia, in the Siberian Taiga known as Tunguska, in which several eyewitnesses report a UFO came from the sky and crash-landed. The scientists, expecting it was a meteor, drilled for meteoric elements, but none were found anywhere near the epicenter of the blast. Instead, massive radiation akin to a nuclear explosion was detected. As this event occurred in 1908, well before mankind had the power of nuclear weapons, this for Von Däniken is yet another inexplicable phenomenon that fits into his theory of interference from advanced alien civilizations.

Von Däniken laments the "stupidity" of attention-seekers and con men, who claim to have seen aliens just for a newspaper headline, or who offer fanciful (and false) accounts of alien abduction, as these people block the way to real scientific research and encourage the "junk science" label with which UFO research has been tarnished. As with the other areas the author has touched on, the scientific community is urged to "look with new eyes" at UFO research and shed its prejudice.



Chapter 11 and Chapter 12

Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11 - Humanity's attempt to communicate with extraterrestrial intelligence via radio waves is discussed. The first serious effort in this field was initiated by Dr. Frank Drake, who led a project to direct a large radio-telescope on the star Tau Ceti. His goal was to "tune in" to radio communications made by aliens. This effort did not succeed, as his instruments were not strong enough for a star so far away, but nonetheless similar projects are continuing using better instruments and pointing at closer stars. Von Däniken is hopeful some communication might yet be had. Von Däniken also suggests projects to undertake to make Earth more noticeable to extraterrestrials, such as emitting laser beams or severely altering a large portion of Earth geography in order to draw a picture to be seen from space, like the picture of an atom.

Aside from that, Von Däniken is hopeful that a more efficient and quicker technology than radio waves may soon be used to attempt communications. The author even theorizes that "thought transference," a field gaining increasing acceptance, may be a fruitful avenue in this regard. To support this assertion, Von Däniken points to the famous Edgar Cayce and his apparent ability to channel knowledge from other people's brains while in a trance. For example, Cayce would prescribe correct medications and remedies for difficult health issues while having no personal knowledge of medicine. Von Däniken is fascinated by Cayce and this notion of "shared" or transferable knowledge.

Changing subjects, Von Däniken next explains the "Green Bank Formula," which was created by a dozen top scientists at a conference in Green Bank, West Virginia. By multiplying several variables, such as "number of stars with possible living beings" and "number of planets inhabited by developed civilizations," the Green Bank Formula provides a range for the number of possible worlds inhabited by intelligent life. The lowest number is forty (40), and the highest is fifty million (50,000,000).

Von Däniken praises these scientists for their pursuit of a relatively new science called exobiology, meaning the study of extraterrestrial life, and he names these and other scientists leading the field, including "father of the Saturn rocket" Wernher von Braun. Praise is also given to several promising events on the contemporary horizon, including a slew of probes and mini-laboratories scheduled to land on Mars, and the work of Dr. Stuhlinger in Huntsville, Alabama, nicknamed "Rocket City," where the citizens have enthusiastically embraced rocket science and the attempt to explore space. A conversation between the author and the august Dr. Wernher von Braun is related, in which the author asks Braun if he believes extraterrestrial life exists and if it visited mankind in its infancy. Von Braun is cautious but optimistic that alien life does indeed exist, though we may be too far away from anyone else to ever make contact.



Chapter 12 - In conclusion, Von Däniken riddles the reader with a series of questions, such as "Will men conquer space and inhabit other planets some day?" and "Will it become possible in the distant future to prolong man's life indefinitely with artificial hearts, lungs, kidneys, etc.?" Von Däniken maintains that most of the answers to these kinds of questions can be found by space research and a more enlightened scientific community open to the possibility of intelligent alien life. Von Däniken deems this kind of work and perspective "futurology," and praises institutions like the Rand Corporation in California for the work they've already done toward this end. The reader is urged to discount the word "impossible," and instead regard even the most fantastic imaginary concept or invention as possible. Only then can man fulfill his destiny and fully appreciate his past.



Characters

Author Erich von Däniken

The author of *CHARIOTS OF THE GODS*, Eric von Däniken, is a constant presence in the book and impresses himself enough to deserve recognition as a character. He claims expert scientific knowledge on a variety of subjects, including archaeology, astronomy, and biology, and as such acts as a confident guide for the reader on a tour of antiquity. However, his tone is casual, inquisitive without being accusatory, and conversational. His goal is to open the readers' eyes to new possibilities, rather than closing them shut by offering any "certain" or "authoritative" answer to the questionable phenomenon he introduces. He is a polite skeptic, and while he relishes his role as outside agitator and feather-ruffler, he is not out to ruin anyone's career or make a fool of anyone in particular. He writes for the layperson, explaining archaeological sites and facts of antiquity as if the reader were just being introduced to the subject. He is a surveyor of the entirety of antiquity, again with more questions than answers, and thus only touches upon the majority of his subjects, avoiding the sort of erudite depth and specialized language that may lose the average reader. In that sense, Von Däniken is frequently able to step back from his seeming expertise in order to perceive basic realities and ask commonsensical questions, all in a congenial manner that invites the reader to join in.

The Scientific Community

Erich von Däniken sets "the scientific community" as his adversary in the endeavor of writing the book and airing its ideas. This community, full of academic intellectuals and erudite research scientists, is uniformly regarded as close-minded, rigid, stubborn, guarded, elite, prejudiced, and political. After many years of complacency and intellectual laziness, this community is unable to see the forest for the trees and unable to examine evidence in front of their nose if said evidence does not easily fit into the accepted understanding of things. They are quick to dismiss anything foreign to their well-worn assumptions as erroneous, short-sighted, or the work of a crackpot, without the proper and objective testing and research that characterizes the rigor of the scientific method. Erich von Däniken urges this close-minded community to open its collective eyes, to establish a cross-disciplinary, "Utopian" method of research that would test theories rather than dismiss them outright. Working together for the betterment of mankind, rather than the glory of the individual or the reputation of a legend, contemporary scientists have the capacity to unlock the very secrets of mankind's "dim past." Von Däniken sees potential to change the mindset of this community, in the promise of some contemporary scientists who have expressed an openness and willingness toward exploring the possibility of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. These are the "exobiologists," or those who study extraterrestrial life, and humankind is indebted to this subsection of biology for their courage and healthy skepticism.



Piri Reis

This famous Turkish admiral had in his possession ancient maps of uncanny accuracy that appear to have been drawn while at a great height above the Earth. The "Piri Reis maps" are another piece of the puzzle for Von Däniken in proving his theory. How was the ancient cartographer able to draw the continents from such a height?

Ezekiel

This biblical prophet describes accounts of angels arriving in thunder-making, flying vehicles, with wheels which could go on their side and yet still turn. For Von Däniken, this description could actually be describing something like an amphibious helicopter, as piloted by ancient astronauts visiting early Man.

Noah

Noah is described as either an alien child, or half-human, half-alien hybrid, who is saved from the Flood in an elimination of unwanted human species in order to breed another more desirable one. For evidence of Noah's extraterrestrial origins, Von Däniken points out an account in the Dead Sea Scrolls of Noah's father, Lamech, stating that Noah does not look like Lamech in the slightest.

Kukumatz

Kukumatz is the chief Mayan god and is famously depicted in a stone relief found in Palenque, the so-called "Old Kingdom" of the Mayans. This relief is interpreted by Von Däniken as showing Kukumatz in a rocketship with smoke and fire trailing from behind the vehicle, and Kukumatz himself seated sideways as if in a rocket, hands on some indefinable controls and foot on a pedal, wearing a helmet with antennae on his head, blasting off upwards. All these aspects of the relief cause Von Däniken to theorize that the relief bears a fairly realistic representation of Kukumatz as an alien astronaut blasting off from Earth back to his home planet.

Quetzlcoatl

A later Mayan god, Quetzlcoatl, is depicted as a winged snake who arrives on earth to teach Mayans the basics of law and culture. Having accomplished sewing the seeds of civilization, Quetzlcoatl flies back to "the morning star," promising to return at some future date. This is precisely the sort of mythology Von Däniken makes real in his supposition that alien astronauts did in fact visit Earth in mankind's infancy.



Dr. Frank Drake

Dr. Frank Drake headed the first real effort to communicate with alien life via radio waves in 1960, operating from a radio-telescope located in Green Bank, West Virginia. While this experiment was a failure, it nonetheless spurred other members of the scientific community to attempt similar efforts with better and better technology and knowledge. Von Däniken is certain that one day these sort of efforts will prove fruitful.

Edgar Cayce

Edgar Cayce was a poor farmer who, after a bad illness, was able to go into a trance and list precise medical remedies for sick people, remedies which would almost always work perfectly. Cayce, who had no knowledge of medicine, claimed he could communicate with the brains of those who did possess such knowledge, in an example of "thought transference." Von Däniken points to Cayce as an example of the type of communication mankind could eventually achieve and which would be far superior to radio waves for the purposes of contacting extraterrestrial life. After all, it is said that the average human being uses only 10% of their brain.

Wernher von Braun

A famous scientist and "the father of the Saturn rocket," Von Däniken is thrilled to relay a conversation between himself and Von Braun, in which Von Braun states he is open to the possibility of intelligent life existing on other planets, though he doubts that with the incredible distance between planets, we would ever be able to contact them. For the author, Von Braun represents a change in the scientific community, a leading scientist who is nevertheless open to Von Däniken's revolutionary theory.



Objects/Places

Photon Propulsion

Photon Propulsion is technology that would allow a large, ocean-liner-sized rocketship to achieve speeds at 99% of the speed of light. Through this type of propulsion, it would be possible to visit worlds many light-years away; this is precisely the type of technology needed for alien astronauts to visit Earth, and eventually for mankind to visit other planets.

Nazca Lines

The famous Nazca lines, made by Incas in the shape of geometrical patterns and animals is, for Von Däniken, a piece of evidence for the existence of alien astronauts. Von Däniken believes it would be impossible for the Incas to manufacture these huge shapes without advanced aerial and surveying technology. These lines may, in fact, be runways or signs made for returning astronaut "gods."

Tiahuanaco

This geographical area and renowned archaeological site (in modern-day Bolivia) bears several features Von Däniken explores in light of his theory. The site bears advanced astronomical inscriptions, depictions of flying gods, figures with helmet-like heads and antennae, and a mythology concerning a god-woman coming down to Earth in a rocketship, all of which for the author speaks to the fact of an alien visit.

Cave Paintings

Cave Paintings are of frequent study in the book. Figures of "gods" that feature bulky suits, round, dome-shaped heads, and antennae-like horns are interpreted as realistic depictions of alien astronauts in spacesuits who visited Earth and were perceived as gods.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The biblical account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is re-interpreted as the purposeful erasure of an undesirable group of humans by aliens in the process of selectively breeding human beings. Von Däniken feels the account speaks to a nuclear explosion as the real cause for the destruction of the cities.



The Flood

The Flood as recounted in both the Bible and in the Epic of Gilgamesh is for the author a verifiable example of alien astronauts selectively breeding human beings. The claim is that the aliens had the technology to erase mankind in a flood and start again with Noah, a human/alien hybrid.

Mahabharata

The Mahabharata is an Indian epic that predates the Bible. In this ancient text, the author finds more examples to fit into his hypothesis of ancient astronauts, including the description of "Vimanas," flying vehicles which could cover vast distances in short times (rocketships), and an account of a catastrophic event (nuclear explosion).

Egyptian Pyramids

The Egyptian pyramids provide a plethora of puzzling inconsistencies, from how the great stones were moved, to what manpower the Egyptians really had versus how much it would have taken to erect the pyramids, to the amazing stone joining accuracy, accuracy nearly impossible to achieve even with modern-day technology. For Von Däniken, these inconsistencies are explained away if we consider that alien astronauts actually aided in the construction of these great monuments.

Easter Island

The seeming impossibility of moving the humongous Easter Island statues, and the task of hoisting stone hats weighing many tons on top of statues measuring 30 to 60 feet, provide the author with more inexplicable feats.

Mayan Calendar

The Mayan Calendar contains uncanny astronomical calculations, sometimes accurate to the thousandth of a percent, such as the Venusian orbit or the phases of the moon. For Von Däniken, it would be impossible for a primitive people like the Mayans to achieve this level of accuracy and knowledge, and the conclusion to be drawn is that an ancient alien race provided this information to them.

Green Bank Formula

This formula, developed at a conference which includes Carl Sagan and other astrophysicists and exobiologists, multiplies a number of factors involving the probability of life on other planets in order to provide a range, N, of planets with advanced,

intelligent civilizations. According to the book, the number could be as low as forty (40) and as high as fifty million (50,000,000).



Themes

Alien Astronauts Visited Mankind in its Distant Past

Erich von Däniken's theory that alien astronauts visited primitive man and "jumpstarted" technology and civilization is the clear controlling idea in the book, and the idea most likely to jar the scientific community and cause a stir in the general populace. To be specific, the author imagines a race of giants (for so many ancient texts speak of "giants"), with technology sufficiently advanced from our own that would allow long-distance space travel. These beings, for a reason the author refrains from guessing upon, arrive on Earth sometime in the Early Paleolithic Age, literally at the dawn of civilization. They teach mankind basic laws (e.g. Moses bringing down commandments from an unseen God on high), masonry techniques (for what else could explain the marvelous Egyptian pyramids?), astronomy (e.g. the uncanny accuracy of the Mayan calendar) and agriculture, sewing the seeds of civilization. This alien race also engages in genetic engineering of a sort and selective breeding, either interbreeding with mankind or eliminating a failed species from the Earth (as in the Biblical Flood) only to start the species anew. The alien race, after their visit or perhaps after several visits, leave in their rocketship, promising to return at some far future date. Primitive man, having no explanation for these creatures and their ships and advanced technology, assert that the aliens are "gods." These gods are then revered and depicted commonly as flying or descending from the heavens (as would be appropriate for astronauts). Drawing from the fields of archaeology, anthropology, and ancient literature, Von Däniken proceeds to support his controversial hypothesis by pointing out certain facts and phenomenon that defy easy or traditional explanation and fitting them into his hypothesis through novel re-interpretation.

The Rigidity of the Scientific Community

The author anticipates that his revolutionary theories will be regarded as "New Age" or "junk" science, or simply dismissed altogether as the work of a crackpot or attention-seeker, and thus the author prepares the reader for this firestorm of controversy by criticizing the contemporary scientific community. Stuck in their ways, blind to new ideas, prejudiced and political are but a few of the characterizations accorded by Von Däniken to the scientific community against which he is a happy outsider and common-sense agitator. These unflattering characteristics have several consequences, namely that, like a "stuffed goose," the community is unable to accept any new theories or ideas. Also, differing fields of science (say, archaeology and chemistry) are guarded and resistant to sharing information, resulting in much less progress and scientific truth than if there were a truly enthusiastic cross-disciplinary system. Von Däniken calls for a "Utopian" revolution within the scientific community, such that prejudices are shed, old theories are re-examined with a skeptical eye, disciplines share information and aid one another, and new theories are met not with disdain and ridicule but with objectivity and proper respect. Having little hope that this "Utopian" revolution would begin at the upper



echelons of science and academia, the author instead speaks directly to the average person, hoping that a popular outcry and a mountain of common-sense objections to traditional explanations might throw scientists and members of academia from their ivory tower.

The Importance of Continued Space Research

On the cusp of the American moon landing, author Erich von Däniken feels continued research and exploration of space, what he deems "futuology," is crucial to the future of humankind. There are first the technological advances and by-products of space research that mankind has already benefited and profited from, such as Teflon coating on kitchenware, athletic shoe construction aping spacesuit construction, and cordless electronics. These alone might spur humankind on, especially when the objection that space research is "too expensive" is put forth. Secondly, there are pressing Earth problems, chiefly overpopulation and subsequent energy and food shortages, that compel humankind into utilizing resources on other planets. Von Däniken imagines much of future space exploration will be focused on discovery and extraction of "fissionable material" from other planets that might be used back on Earth in a nuclear reactor, for example. Similar to the pending emergency of overpopulation which threatens mankind's livelihood and existence, another key reason for space exploration is the goal of mankind inhabiting several planets all over the galaxy, such that a catastrophic or cosmic event does not singularly wipe out all of humankind. These events could be human-made (nuclear war) or the result of cosmic realities, such as the Sun's eventual death and expansion into a Red Giant, or a meteor striking Earth and ending life as it is known. The very future of humankind hinges upon the exploration of space.



Style

Perspective

Speaking in the first-person, Author Erich von Däniken makes it a point to stand outside the contemporary scientific community, which he characterizes as narrow-minded and dogmatic. In his self-ascribed role as an outsider, Von Däniken is by contrast skeptical (which he defines as "open to anything"), questioning, iconoclastic, and receptive to new ideas. He freely admits that his theories and interpretations are controversial and a threat to an insular, even smug, community of scientists content to rely on long-held assumptions. These assumptions, relied upon not because of quality, objective, and cross-disciplinary scientific research but because of intellectual laziness, reputation, and the failure for different fields of science to communicate and share information, lay bare problematic facts. These facts are square pegs to the round holes the scientific community has drilled for them, and Von Däniken has systematically arranged the discourse such that only an intelligent, objective expert like himself could untangle old, incorrect suppositions and prejudice, to "clear the slate" in a revolutionary matter. Authorial perspective is ultimately a (constructed) combination of expertise and common-sense. Von Däniken possesses the expertise to evaluate antiquity, but the common-sense to step back and ask basic questions which shatter preconceptions. It is at the level of common-sense that Von Däniken communicates with the supposed reader, an intelligent layman.

Tone

Tone in CHARIOTS OF THE GODS is casual and intimate. Von Däniken clearly wishes to establish an "us versus them" rapport with his reader, who is assumed to be an intelligent person receptive to looking at things in new ways, but nonetheless a layperson who must be guided. Von Däniken, though he does a good bit of introduction, teaching, and explanation of academic subjects, is never dogmatic or patronizing, and this choice of tone is crucial, for it is the scientific community which is patently dogmatic and patronizing, and it is the scientific community ("them") against which Von Däniken draws his battle lines. Von Däniken is therefore conversational, avoiding a scientist's technical depth or academic formality in an effort to connect with the average reader on his or her own level.

Tone could also be said to be polite and even cautious. Given the controversial, and even damaging, nature of the claims put forth, this polite aspect of the tone is important in avoiding any further alienation or ridicule the claims may encounter. Thus, though criticizing the scientific community, Von Däniken refrains from naming names or engaging in personal attacks. Similarly, though claims about ancient astronauts would seem to attack and undermine both primitive and modern religious convictions, Von Däniken refrains from demeaning religion or declaring it a farce. In fact, Von Däniken is quick to reveal that he is a spiritual man, and that the true God may be revealed in the



end, beyond the astronaut visitors. Throughout, Von Däniken makes it a point to question rather than attack, and offer alternative theories rather than accuse.

Structure

CHARIOTS OF THE GODS is divided into twelve chapters plus an introduction. These chapters are short and easily-digestible, usually concentrating on a single subject within the realm of study, such as Easter Island or the Egyptian pyramids. The short, focused chapters, working together with tone, provide an accessible book designed for a layperson. Chapter chronology follows a logical order. The reader is first introduced at a most general level to the basic question which will color the rest of the book: Are there intelligent beings in the cosmos, and have they visited mankind in the distant past? From here, the author provides a hypothetical future for mankind, in which mankind visits a distant world with a primitive but intelligent culture, and then teaches this culture the basics of civilization. This hypothetical scenario, which the reader considers plausible in the future should proper space technology be developed, is then turned on its head, as the author urges the reader to consider the equally plausible scenario that mankind instead was the primitive culture visited instead of the visitor. With this basic framework in place, Von Däniken then takes the reader on a tour of antiquity, interpreting hitherto "unexplainable" or problematic historical facts and events in light of the theoretical framework. Finally, in the end, Von Däniken links the study of antiquity to continued exploration and research into outer space, conflating the two and stating that the study of mankind's past as well as mankind's future is crucial in furthering civilization and ensuring long-term survival of the species.

Quotes

Introduction, pg. ix: "It took courage to write this book, and it will take courage to read it. Because its theories and proofs do not fit into the mosaic of traditional archaeology, constructed so laboriously and firmly cemented down, scholars will call it nonsense and put it on the index of those books which are better left unmentioned. Laymen will withdraw into the snail shell of their familiar world when face with the probability that finding out about our past will be even more mysterious and adventurous than finding out about the future.

Nevertheless, one thing is certain. There is something inconsistent about our past, that past that lies thousands and millions of years behind us. The past teemed with unknown gods who visited the primeval earth in manned spaceships."

Chapter 1, pg. 6: "We - the paragons of creation? - took 400,000 years to reach our present state and our present stature. Who can produce concrete proof to show why another planet should not have provided more favorable conditions for the development of other or similar intelligences? Is there any reason why we may not have 'competitors' on another planet who are equal or superior to us? Are we entitled to discard this possibility? We have done so up to the present."

Chapter 2, pg. 13: "While our spaceship disappears again into the mists of the universe, our friends [extraterrestrial semisavages] will talk about the miracle - 'The gods were here!' They will translate it into their simple language and turn it into a saga to be handed down to their sons and daughters. They will turn the presents and implements and everything that the space travelers left behind into holy relics."

Chapter 3, pgs. 34-35: "This strange medley of 'impossibilities' should make us curious and uneasy. By what means, with what intuition, did the primitive cave dwellers manage to draw the stars in their correct positions? From what precision workshop did the cut crystal lenses come? How could anyone smelt and model platinum, since platinum begins to melt only at 1,800 degrees Celsius? And how did the ancient Chinese make aluminum, a metal which has to be extracted from bauxite under very great chemico-technical difficulties?

Impossible questions, to be sure, but does that mean that we should not ask them? Since we are not prepared to accept or admit that there was a higher culture or an equally perfect technology before our own, all that is left is the hypothesis of a visit from space! As long as archaeology is conducted as it has been thus far, we shall never have a chance to discover whether our dim past was really dim and not perhaps quite enlightened."

Chapter 4, pg. 53: "Does not this seriously pose the question whether the human race is not an act of deliberate 'breeding' by unknown beings from outer space? Otherwise what can be the sense of the constantly recurring fertilization of human beings by giants



and sons of heaven, with the consequent extermination of unsuccessful specimens? Seen in this light, the Flood becomes a preconceived project by unknown beings with the intention of exterminating the human race except for a few noble exceptions. But if the Flood, the course of which is historically proved, was quite deliberately planned and prepared - and that several hundred years before Noah received orders to build the ark - then it can no longer be accepted as divine judgment."

Chapter 5, pgs. 62-63: "Many opportunities for research into the ancient East undoubtedly foundered on the inviolability and sacredness of the Bible. People did not dare to ask questions and voice their doubts aloud in the face of this taboo. Even the scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ostensibly so enlightened, were still caught in the mental fetters of thousand-year-old errors, because the way back would inevitably have called in question parts of the biblical story. [...] The very man who wants to preserve the religious dogmas of the Bible intact ought to be interested in clarifying who actually educated men in antiquity, who gave them the first rules for a communal life, who handed down the first laws of hygiene, and who annihilated the degenerate stock."

Chapter 6, pg. 75: "It is impossible and incredible that the chroniclers of the Mahabharata, the Bible, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the texts of the Eskimos, the American Indians, the Scandinavians, the Tibetans, and many, many other sources should all tell the same stories - of flying 'gods,' strange heavenly vehicles, and the frightful catastrophes connected with these apparitions - by chance and without any foundation. They cannot all have had the same ideas all over the world. The almost uniform texts can stem only from facts, i.e., from prehistoric events."

Chapter 7, pg. 108: "The first doubts are beginning to insinuate themselves into stereotyped archaeological theory, but what we need to do is to force breaches in the thicket of the past. Landmarks must be set up again; wherever possible, a new series of fixed dates must be established.

Let me make it clear that I am not doubting the history of the last 2,000 years here. I am speaking solely and exclusively of the most remote antiquity, of the blackest darkness of time, which I am striving to illuminate by asking new questions.

Nor can I give any figures and dates showing when the visit of unknown intelligences from the universe began to influence our young intelligences. But I venture to doubt the current datings applied to the remote past. I would suggest, on tolerably good grounds, placing the incident I am concerned with in the Early Paleolithic Age - between 10,000 and 40,000 B.C."

Chapter 8, pg. 111: "Easter Island lies far away from any continent or civilization. The islanders are more familiar with the moon and the stars than any other country. No trees grow on the island, which is a tiny speck of volcanic stone. The usual explanation, that the stone giants were moved to their present sites on wooden rollers, is not feasible in



this case, either. In addition, the island can scarcely have provided food for more than 2,000 inhabitants. [...] A shipping trade, which brought food and clothing to the island for the stonemasons, is hardly credible in antiquity. Then who cut the statues out of the rock, who carved them and transported them to their sites? How were they moved across country for miles without rollers? How were they dressed, polished, and erected? How were the hats, the stone for which came from a different quarry from that of the statues, put in place?"

Chapter 9, pgs. 124-25: "The abundance of hitherto unanswered questions is bewildering: How did the Mayas know about Uranus and Neptune? Why are the observation posts in the observatory at Chichen not directed at the brightest stars? What does the stone relief of the rocket-driving god at Palenque mean? What is the point of the Mayan calendar with its calculations for 400,000,000 years? Where did they get the knowledge required to calculate the solar and Venusian years to four decimal places? Who transmitted their inconceivable astronomical knowledge? Is every fact a chance product of the Mayan intellect or does each fact, or rather do all facts added together, conceal a revolutionary message for a very distant future, as seen from their point in time?"

Chapter 10, pg. 139 : "Even though it will take millions of years, our sun will burn out and die one day. It does not even need that terrible moment when a statesman loses his nerve and sets the atomic annihilation apparatus in motion to cause a catastrophe. An unascertainable and unpredictable cosmic event could bring about the earth's downfall. Man has never yet accepted the idea of such a possibility, and it may be for that reason that he devoutly sought the hope of an afterlife of the spirit and soul in one of the many thousand religions."

Chapter 11, pg. 172: "If we accept [the Green Bank Formula] of this scientific brain trust, civilizations with more advanced technologies than ours may have existed hundreds of thousands of years ago - a fact that supports the theory put forward here of visits by "gods" from the cosmos in the dawn of time. American astrobiologist Dr. Carl Sagan assures us that according to statistical calculations alone the possibility exists that our earth may have been visited by representatives of an extraterrestrial civilization at least once in the course of its history. Fantasy and wishful thinking may be concealed in all the deliberations and suppositions, but the Green Bank Formula is a mathematical formula and thus far removed from mere speculation."

Chapter 12, pg. 187: "Man has a magnificent future ahead of him, a future which will far surpass his magnificent past. We need space research and research into the future and the courage to tackle projects that now seem impossible. For example, the project of concerted research into the past which can bring us valuable memories of the future. Memories which will then be proved and which will illuminate the history of mankind - for the blessing of future generations."



Topics for Discussion

List at least four (4) of the specific aspects of the Egyptian pyramids for which Von Däniken expresses skepticism, and discuss why Von Däniken doubts the traditional explanations for these aspects.

Describe the Mayan Calendar, and how it influenced Mayan building construction. Why does Von Däniken feel this calendar may be the result of a gift from ancient alien astronauts? And how does Von Däniken explain the sudden abandonment of the Mayan Old Kingdom in 600 A.D.?

List and explain three (3) of Von Däniken's reasons why mankind should continue space research and exploration.

In the opinion of the book's author, what is the current general state of the scientific community, including but not limited to archaeologists, biologists, historians, and astronomers? What kinds of changes should this community undergo, and why?

Discuss two (2) of the events or passages in the Bible which Von Däniken re-interprets in light of his hypothesis of alien astronauts.

The Sumerian archaeological remains at Tiahuanaco is an important site for the author in his defense of his controversial theory. Discuss Tiahuanaco and at least three (3) of its features that Von Däniken questions and why he questions them.

Discuss Easter Island and its statues, and why these statues figure prominently in Von Däniken's attempt to prove his theory.

List eight (8) "oddities" of antiquity that Von Däniken mentions, along with a one- or two-sentence explanation of why the oddity does not easily fit into the existing, accepted understanding of antiquity.