

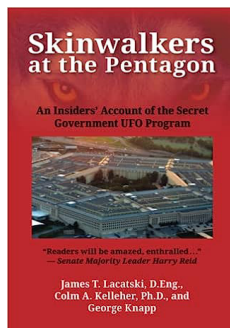
BOOK REVIEW

Skinwalkers at the Pentagon

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In 2017, the public was introduced to the fact that internal investigations into so-called “anomalous aerospace threats” had been quietly conducted under a \$22 million government contract that mainly went to billionaire Robert Bigelow’s Bigelow Aerospace firm in Nevada. This happened due to the influence of Harry Reid, the then-majority leader in the U.S. Senate, who had a strong interest in UFOs. That research was conducted between 2007 and 2012, when the funding ended. The Defense Department decided to turn its attention to higher priority issues that merited funding. Apparently, inadequate results were coming from the effort, said to have been called the AATIP, or Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program. Nevertheless, investigations by persons associated with AATIP, affirmed in a letter from former Senator Harry Reid to NBC to have been led by DoD counterintelligence officer Luis Elizondo, continued in spite of the lack of funding through whatever means they could muster. One of the more seemingly concrete revelations about UFOs, or now UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomena), was that the government held physical artifacts that were being studied as well as having filmed evidence of UAPs from Navy pilots.

So, with this as a backdrop, it was of interest to see the release of “Skinwalkers at the Pentagon” by authors directly involved with the eventual creation of the government’s new UAP program. Dr. James Lacatski and Dr. Colm Kelleher are described as the overseers of the operation of AAWSAP for their day-to-day activities. However, when the government’s involvement was announced in 2017, it was said to have been called AATIP. I was puzzled. The introduction to the book said that AAWSAP was not AATIP, that AATIP was a made-up substitute name for AAWSAP via a letter from Harry Reid to the then Deputy Secretary of Defense in 2009. This switch was due to the fact that the AAWSAP program was classified, and the nickname was used and given to the New York Times for public release. This is reminiscent of how former head of the Air Force’s Project Blue Book, Captain Edward Ruppelt, had referred to the UFO study effort by Battelle Memorial Institute publicly in the early 1950s as “Project Bear,” or the public use of “Project Saucer” as a nickname for an earlier rendition of Blue Book, “Project Grudge.”

From the point of view of security overseers, the use of pseudonyms to hide real information is a long-standing practice that achieves particular goals. However, in time the revelation of deceiving information being used to mislead has the effect of seeding mistrust among those to whom the information is being given. Given that AATIP was asserted to be the government’s UAP program, lots of people filed lots of FOIA requests in an effort to peel away the secrecy about this now-openly discussed effort. Except that all that effort was for naught since AATIP did not exist as an official program, and the government could legitimately claim that no records could be located.

The book goes on to clarify in early pages just what influenced the government’s seeming new-found interest in UAPs: Skinwalker Ranch! This place had been in the news cycle off and on for over twenty years as a focal point of paranormal activity. “Paranormal” meant disembodied voices, fantastical creatures both on the ground and flying,



mysterious vortices appearing from nowhere, aerial objects of varying kinds, and a variety of other phenomena. At the same time, there is a certain degree of the raising of eyebrows in consideration of all this. Exactly what existed to verify that all this was real? Was Skinwalker Ranch a “Paranormal Disneyland” as some have described it?

The one thing that the original government effort did not have that this latest one does is that Projects Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book did not spring from the paranormal then. “Well, what about UFOs?”, one might ask. Allegations of unknown flying objects witnessed by military and civilian figures that occasionally were photographed and detected by radar was a legitimate security response for the government if only for the reason that these incidents could have been foreign intrusions, meaning Earth-borne flying objects, and not paranormal events.

The purpose of this book is partly to describe the origins of recent government attention to UAPs and partly to legitimize a variety of paranormal phenomena that are said to take place at, or due to, Skinwalker Ranch, which led to that government attention. It is a bit worrisome that the potential for a less-than-diligent-attitude toward paranormal reporting could be the underpinning of what outwardly seems to be a renewed government approach to UFO/UAP incidents.

There are a lot of alphabet-soup acronyms in the descriptions of government investigations into UAPs. This is inevitable since this reviewer encountered much the same decades ago when researching Freedom of Information Act releases after Project Blue Book closed in 1970. The authors unravel this as well as can be expected. Secrecy of behind-the-scenes UAP investigation continues as it was in the past for legitimate reasons (national security over methods and personnel) as well as not-so-legitimate reasons (mistakes, mishandling, bending of regulations).

What might be said to be a positive effect of new investigations is the years-long surfacing of reports of strange aerial phenomena by U.S. Navy personnel, leading to a more concerted effort to monitor and analyze these events as at least foreign technological intrusions into U.S. national security, or at most previously unknown technological developments. An assortment of military reports gathered by AAWSAP in conjunction with Bigelow Aerospace (the biggest corporate beneficiary of the original \$22 million government contract) is discussed in chapter 13, including mention of the 1975 overflights roughly forty years earlier. The original scope of the federal inquiries was to have been limited to the early 2000s, but more recently, guidelines were extended further back in time to the 1940s.

Flying triangles and colored orbs are given separate discussions by the authors as part of the phenomenology

they try to establish, though as with any other kind of UAP investigation, the conclusion is subject to the diligence of the investigator or investigating body in often assessing fragmentary information. One “Georgia” triangle incident was said to have conformed to a “NIDS Low Flying Triangle” database group of entries, except that “radiation” caused a “plethora” of medical injuries. The event is described in some detail, which included a “men-in-black” sort of encounter with the Department of Homeland Security, but HIPAA laws forbade the BAASS investigators from revealing any details, including the identity of the witness. In other words, little of importance could be independently checked. Did the triangle really cause the medical problem, or was there an alternate explanation for the condition? Well, the book says yes, but specifics are off-limits.

Mixed in between these discussions is reporting of the more vaporous paranormal phenomena that constitute the Skinwalker Ranch saga which makes up a large part of the book. The ranch became an object of interest for Robert Bigelow, a Las Vegas billionaire who had a strong penchant for UFOs and the paranormal. Bigelow had purchased Skinwalker Ranch to explore alleged paranormal activity there. In 1995, he created an investigative organization called NIDS, National Institute for Discovery Science, primarily to collect evidence of the paranormal periodically reported by witnesses at or near the ranch. Thus, it became a modern legend.

A bewildering array of strange phenomena has poured out of the ranch since. UFOs, weird electromagnetic effects, cattle mutilations, portals or vortices appeared out of thin air, an assortment of creatures both flying and ground-based, ghosts and poltergeists, destructive energy, and radiation from undefined sources were all part of the mix. Once, a golden Moebius strip was said to appear to witnesses. Odd animals were said to have been shot but were seemingly invulnerable to bullets. A ranch employee told this reviewer of seeing a frog with the mouth of an alligator that bounded away. Though he had a camera, no photographs were taken, and the frog eluded pursuit. This same witness told of seeing a man standing on a cliff suddenly bending over as if standing on hands and feet. The “man” turned into a werewolf who then, not surprisingly, ran off and vanished. This time photos were taken, though only of prints in the ground and only of wolf prints. No transition prints from a man to a wolf were evident, and no word about analysis.

While these personal recollections to this reviewer were not in the book, they were representative of the kinds of sightings than came from Skinwalker Ranch. In other words, they were not well-documented and strained credibility. Another instance that IS in the book

was reported by NIDS investigator Colm Kelleher and DIA analyst Juliett Witt of seeing what looked like a 150-pound pig that had a beaver-like tail and was covered in spines resembling a dinosaur. It was described as having “glided” past them with no noise and apparently not disturbing the ground or leaving footprints. This has mockingly become known as a “dinobeaver” in paranormal circles (page 56). Once again, no photographs by investigators carrying cameras. Witt was involved in later paranormal activity at her home in Virginia when a roommate was frightened by a body standing over his bed. The body vanished when the lights were turned on. She also told of a giant owl that attacked her car a week later that left visible marks on the car. Anticipating details of an analysis on the owl marks as I read on, nothing further was said about it, only that she continued to experience paranormal events (page 57).

Skinwalker Ranch is a blizzard of this type of information: sensational, lurid, and chilling but always hitting a brick wall when it came down to being able to prove that these incidents were genuine manifestations of truly strange phenomena. It was an endless source of frustration reading this as one would like to think that all of it is real and an indicator of new realms of reality waiting to be plumbed for life-changing discoveries. Instead, it felt like Skinwalker Ranch, like other paranormal topics, is always in the business of selling belief and hope. A story promises amazing revelations, and when a final piece of the puzzle is awaited to drop, the placement of that piece is kicked down the road into a future promising that the piece will fall into formulating a solution and almost never seeming to do so. I say “almost” because at least one example of previous phenomenology, transient lunar phenomena, has been established as genuine. As for the remainder, it reminds me of the doomsday predictions, which are seen with excitement by many as future drama, yet to date, have been one hundred percent wrong!

Chapter Nine (page 80), “Bringing Something Home – The Infectious Agent Model,” injects another dimension into the selling of hope and belief by paranormal advocates of the Skinwalker narrative. The reader is told that anomalies occurring there can be transmitted by witnesses to those events elsewhere, bringing the anomalous effects with them to other locations as if spreading an infectious disease. So, the peculiarities of Skinwalker Ranch were no longer confined to Utah anymore but could conceivably be disseminated over the entire planet. One group of DIA personnel was sent to the ranch to look into odd incidents early on in the AAWSAP inquiries. According to the authors, all in the group had “brought something home” when they left, and they weren’t just souvenirs. The leader of this group, given the name “Axelrod,” said his family had experienced visions of colored

orbs and “dogmen” in their backyard, along with poltergeist effects and “black shadow people.”

What is one to think of this? Is it provably real? We can’t tell because the witnesses are anonymous. And no physical evidence seems to exist for the sightings. All that could be said is the witnesses believed what they saw was real (unless, of course, if there was an overt attempt to deceive). With sympathies to witnesses who genuinely believe they saw an anomalous event, such witnesses much understand and expect that telling this information to those of the rest of us who never saw such anomalies will result in hard questions that probably can not be answered very well.

However, in the case of Axelrod, there is an assurance that medical evidence does exist for a direct relation between the anomalies and a so-called “Hitchhiker Effect” on the bodies and minds of these individuals. One investigator claimed that the effect happened at a higher rate in Skinwalker visitors who “do not treat the phenomenon with respect.” Indeed, are the proponents of this effect inferring that it possesses intelligence that decides the mental state of viewers and inflicts punishment if they do not think the right way? It would be helpful for independent investigators to be able to interview witnesses further about medical evidence. Unfortunately, the Skinwalker investigators have invoked HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, 1996) laws in not allowing their interviewees to be questioned on these issues. Anonymous witnesses are unable to be questioned, which is not helpful in arguing for the Hitchhiker Effect.

The description of events, the anonymity, and the lack of hard evidence smacks of investigators who are not making decisions fully based upon information as much as they are based on their own personal beliefs and the beliefs of others. The investigators seem to accept the assertions of anomalies as ‘unquestioned fact’ instead of potential belief-fueled impressions of night terrors induced by dreams and liberal doses of imagination. Combining the above with amorphous assumptions about connections between the perceived events and physical objects on the ranch to individual medical afflictions, a perfect storm of paranormal hysteria can be created.

Example of a Danger

Dr. Travis Taylor, an engineer and lead investigator for the TV show “The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch” on the History Channel, claimed in 2020 that he was hit with a dangerous burst of radiation after looking into a hole on the ranch property. He also claims to be a victim of the Hitchhiker Effect (see *Mystery Wire*, 6-24-22). If dangerous radiation was present at the time, affecting at least Taylor

and perhaps other occupants with medical problems, why hasn't Skinwalker Ranch been declared a biologically restricted area by federal authorities? Was Skinwalker Ranch even reported as a biologically and radioactively dangerous place? Federal employees were said to have come and gone from the area and carried physiological and psychological ailments with them to where they lived in other parts of the U.S. But, they, and ranch owners, have continued to exploit the property for value gained by advertising it as a "Paranormal Disneyland," oblivious to the threats presented by week in and week out. Notably, they continue to cite those threats and return for more investigations without taking precautions. Neither has there been serious research circulated through the medical profession in peer-reviewed papers documenting such dangerous conditions at this location.

Taylor added this to the lead of chapter nine (page 80): "We don't like to talk about the hitchhiker too much because everybody's afraid it's going to trigger it or something." It seems it had been decided by personnel at Skinwalker that the Hitchhiker Effect was accepted as fact without ever having presented a bit of confirmatory evidence for it to science. Taylor added that instruments were placed at a house and the ranch, and both simultaneously measured "events" apparently confirming the Hitchhiker Effect a thousand miles apart. Again, as I read on expecting the details of this remarkable claim, there was no further elaboration. I hope the intent of this was not to expect the reader to accept these comments at face value.

Perhaps related to the lack of what should be an obvious concern to hazardous conditions is the revelation in November 2022 that a consulting firm created by cast members of the TV show was under contract with three Utah county governments at the rate of over \$58,000 for each county to provide economic consulting services and to strengthen business ties (see expandingfrontiersresearch.org, 11-15-22). Nothing could be more damaging to the idea of a "Paranormal Disneyland" engaged in active attempts to create business than to have state governments label the ranch as a biologically and radioactively hazardous site.

Continuing support for a 'Hitchhiker Effect' was a citation from a 1973 investigation at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory into psychic Uri Geller's mental and physical abilities, which famously included spoon-bending (page 87). Geller's "abilities" have since been debunked via several lawsuits and demonstrations that magicians could reproduce all of Geller's claimed paranormal powers. Investigators of Geller reported "visions" of flying saucers, a hallucination-inducing teasing spirit, and discarnate raven-like birds appearing to them

indoors outside of the locations of Geller's testing. So, the book's authors felt the visions by the Geller investigators were related to the Hitchhiker Effect, though this would presume that they think, in spite of previous problems with Geller's claims, there was validity to the Livermore results, and therefore Geller's psychic powers. In other words, if there was no anomaly with Geller, then how did the Livermore investigators have a Hitchhiker Effect?

It is of interest that the discussion of Geller also cites Dr. Hal Puthoff. Puthoff was involved in the original Geller investigation, as well as in promoting the MJ-12 hoax and the Project SERPO hoax, and as a consultant with AAWSAP and Robert Bigelow's BAASS firm more recently and deeply involved with Skinwalker. Puthoff, at one time, said one of his employees was Richard Doty, a known document forger and a source of questionable UFO claims for four decades (see blueblurrylines.com, 6-22-22), and regarded Doty as a friend. Puthoff has had his hands in many dubious pies, and I'm not sure citing him as a central player in these problem endeavors is a good thing for them.

When the UAPTF issued its report in June 2021, this reviewer noted how it reflected a complete 180-degree turnabout in the government's attitude toward unexplained aerial phenomena, and this is cited in the book. Given this, I must amend that opinion with a concern about the information presented by the authors. It was said that 143 out of 144 reports received from government sources were not able to be identified, or 99.3%. This was a percentage far higher than what had come about in previous government investigations. Was the quality of the reports studied by the task force of such mysterious detail any conventional explanation escaped them? The report was remarkable in this respect for seeming to endorse UAPs as real and unconventional. Or was it?

In June 2022, it was revealed that the chief scientist for the task force results in 2021 was Dr. Travis Taylor, who is also the lead scientist at Skinwalker Ranch and for the History Channel series "The Secret at Skinwalker Ranch." To say that there is a conflict of interest in this fact is an understatement. The lead researcher for presenting the ranch as the location of an unexplained series of bizarre phenomena on TV (the show would not be on TV if they were explainable in his eyes) had also made assessment decisions for UAP events released in 2021. It could be perceived that Taylor and company inflated the number of unknown reports to preserve the mystery of UAPs. An easy way to check this would be to reexamine the investigated UAPTF reports. However, since the reports were gathered partly under the intent to determine if there was a national security threat to the nation, and they were all military reports, none could be made avail-

able publicly for independent study.

So, the reasons for such a high percentage of unknowns that Taylor had concluded existed in the body of observations were shrouded from any scrutiny. Unless those reports can be studied by sources unconnected to Skinwalker Ranch (since a staple of science lies in multiple, independent confirmations of conclusions offered in any study), the 2021 UAPTF announcement must be considered tainted due to possible bias in favor of elevating the mystery of UAPs artificially. After reading Skinwalker Ranch narratives, as the book documents, this introduction to the paranormal appeared to be the driving force by federal employees to support federal funding in the

millions of dollars for new investigations, including into UAPs. That is not to say mysteries cannot exist, but those mysteries must be determined through honest, scientific means.

Brandon Fugal, the current owner of Skinwalker Ranch, in a video interview from 2022 ([youtube.com/watch?v=Q9Kwv_p2Cww](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9Kwv_p2Cww)), may have encapsulated the philosophy surrounding the property: "Acquiring Skinwalker Ranch was part of a religious journey, or at least my spiritual journey." While hard evidence may still be found someday for some paranormal events, it might come in spite of "Skinwalkers at the Pentagon" rather than because of it.