



## THE ALIEN HIGHWAY

STRANGE SIGHTINGS, ALIEN LANDINGS AND SECRET MILITARY PROJECTS. FOLLOWING A TRAIL OF CLUES, **CHRIS WRIGHT** GOES ON A ROAD TRIP FROM ROSWELL TO AREA 51. THE TRUTH, AS THEY SAY, IS OUT THERE

PHOTO: COREIS

It is July, and *Discovery Channel Magazine* is in the middle of the New Mexico desert, in the United States, three hours drive from the nearest town, with a man who believes he may have found parts of an alien spacecraft. Though he is prepared to concede they could also be bits of a beer can. It is a peaceful place, the scrubby, barren emptiness of the windswept high desert so similar to much of the vast American Southwest. But this is no ordinary patch of nothingness: it is perhaps the most revered place in all UFO and conspiracy theory folklore. This is the Roswell crash site.

Roswell today is an unexceptional US town, a long way from anywhere in southeastern New Mexico. Yet certain details set it apart. There are the little green aliens all over the front of the local Walmart for example, and the fake flying saucer protruding from the McDonald's. The focal point of the town — the bedrock of Roswell's tourist economy, in fact — is not a church or a town hall, a theatre or a park, but instead, a UFO museum. That is because Roswell is the home of the most enduring UFO mystery of them all. Here lies, unquestionably, a cover-up of some sort — the only question is, of what?

**THE EVENTS, EXPLAINED**

What we know for sure is that in July 1947, something fell from the sky and crashed on empty ranch-land

north-east of Roswell, and was discovered by a ranch hand called WW Brazel. Having never seen anything like the debris before, he put the wreckage in his pick-up truck, and later drove it to the local sheriff's office. The sheriff duly called the Roswell Army Air Field. Roswell was, at the time, a far bigger military hotbed than it is today, with much of the nation's nuclear testing taking place not very far away. Having received the call, the base commander sent over an intelligence officer, along with a press officer, known as Walter Haut.

Later, Haut called a local radio station, KGFL, with an important press release that was to be read on air. This was no ordinary release, and it was swiftly picked up elsewhere, including a front-page story in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. It referred, unequivocally, to the crash of a flying saucer.

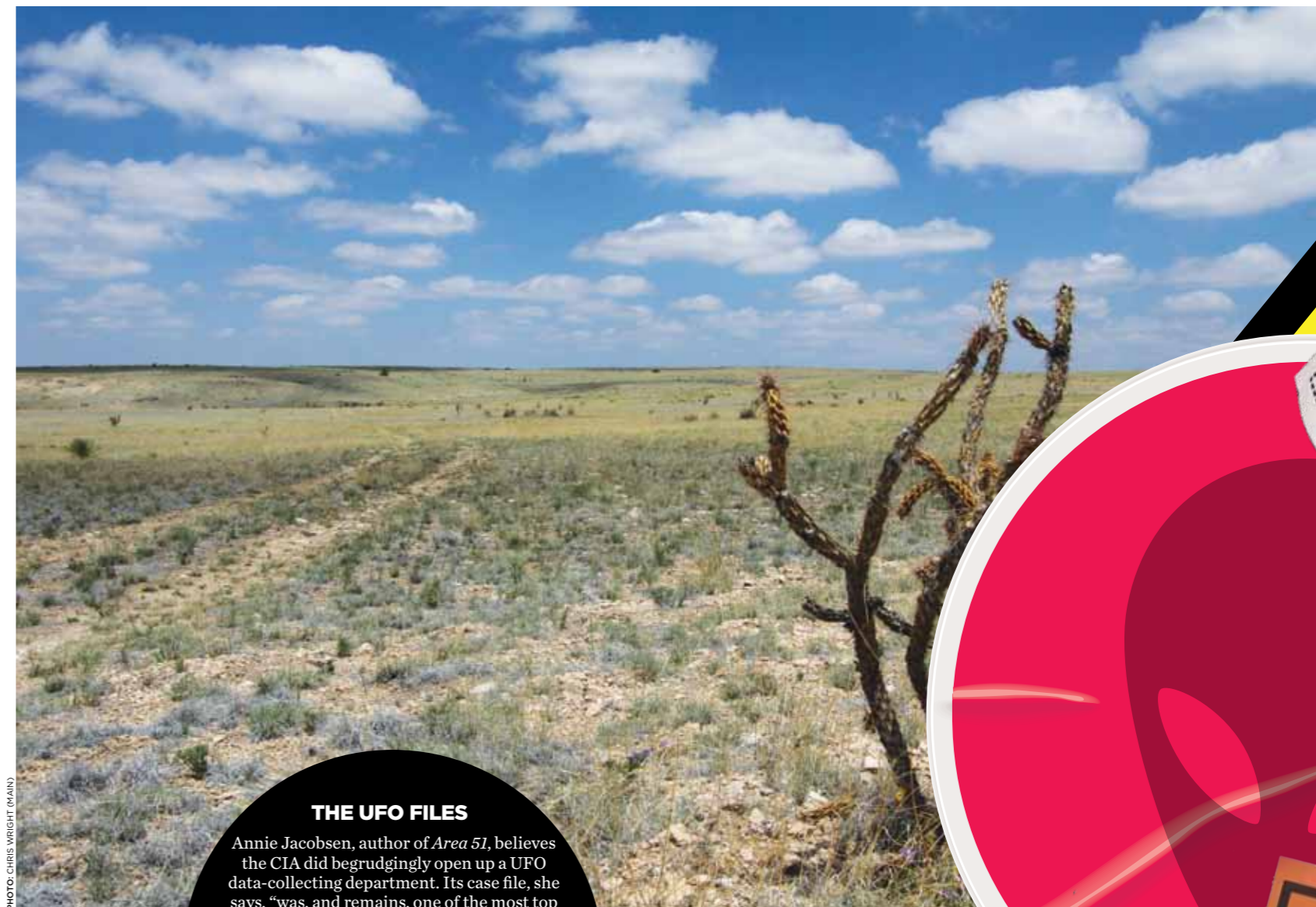


PHOTO: CHRIS WRIGHT (MAIN)

**THE UFO FILES**

Annie Jacobsen, author of *Area 51*, believes the CIA did begrudgingly open up a UFO data-collecting department. Its case file, she says, "was, and remains, one of the most top secret files in CIA history." Even today, it has yet to be declassified. She describes one that was, which shows that by 1951, the Air Force had investigated between 800 and 1,000 UFO sightings across the United States, and 1,900 by 1952. Jacobsen says they generated 37 cubic feet (over one cubic metre) of case files, most of which were easily explained. But there were always a handful that were not — chiefly on Roswell.

**ABOVE:** THE CRASH SITE AT ROSWELL IS QUITE INNOCUOUS, SO IT SEEMS AMAZING THAT FRANK KIMBLER HAS MANAGED TO FIND IT ON HIS OWN

However, later in the same day, another press release was issued. It essentially said that the first had been a silly mistake, and that what had crashed was just a weather balloon. A photo showing some weather balloon wreckage — jetsam that those who had seen the original debris said had absolutely nothing in common with it — was released to the public. People were told, with a firmness that would not become clear until much later, to continue to stick with this revised truth.

Not much more was made of this until in 1978, when a researcher called Stan Friedman began looking into the incident, publishing a book in 1980. After interviewing 62 witnesses who, more than 30 years on, were becoming more willing to speak, Friedman turned up some interesting information, which he included in his book. He claimed that Brazel had been jailed for nearly a week after his discovery, and told to change his story; that boxes of the original debris were loaded onto military trucks and aircraft; that a request was made from the military for child-sized coffins that could be hermetically sealed; that people in town were threatened with prison if they told others what they saw; and that not only had the crash definitely involved a round disk, with an unfamiliar metal that would regain its shape instantly after being crumpled — but that there were child-size, humanoid bodies with large heads, large oval eyes and no noses.

From then on, Roswell has become one of those names with magnetic resonance for those who are drawn to the unknown, or to what is “known” to an exclusive few. The major hole in Friedman’s theory is that there is not one fragment of the craft in civilian hands — supposedly because the military took it all — and hence the evidence we have is eyewitness testimony, not helped by the fact that none of those closest to the incident spoke about it.

Brazel’s incarceration for discovering a weather balloon seems odd. In those days weather balloons were widespread; he would have seen dozens of them, and certainly wouldn’t have bothered to bring it up to a sheriff. Yet he subsequently never discussed what he really saw again. Dee Proctor, a young child who travelled with Brazel when he found or retrieved the wreckage, was so frightened by what he saw that he never spoke about it to anyone, even his closest friends. Both are now dead. Most of the military involved in the aftermath never spoke about it either. Books continue to appear on Roswell every couple of years, but increasingly they quote children or grandchildren of the main players and the evidence becomes more circumstantial.

### WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

Yet there is one fabulous smoking gun. Remember Walter Haut, the man who put the first version on the air? He subsequently founded Roswell’s International UFO Museum and Research Center, in order to deal with all the requests for information. And when he died in 2005, he left a sworn affidavit to be opened after his death. It proved explosive. The affidavit said that the second press release was a fraud, that the first release was true, and that he had indeed seen bodies: “I am convinced that what I personally observed was some type of craft and its crew from outer space.”

If this were so, then why New Mexico? It always seems to be an obscure part of the United States where these incidents arise. And secondly, where are the recovered wreckage and bodies?

As to the first question, as barren as southern New Mexico seems today, in 1947 it was “the single most sensitive weapons-related domain in all of America,” according to Annie Jacobsen, an investigative reporter for *The Los Angeles Times* and author of a new book, *Area 51* — which we will return to later.

If you drive west of Roswell for a few hours you reach White Sands, a huge expanse of pristine, sweeping, blindingly white dunes. Alongside these is the White Sands Missile Range, and not far from that in the 1940s was the Los Alamos Laboratory. This is where the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 had been developed, and where other nuclear projects were now under way. Little Roswell’s air field hosted the 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, which had the long-range bombers equipped to carry (and



PHOTO: COREIS

### THE OFFICIAL VERSION

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash, the US government finally admitted there had been a cover-up at Roswell. An announcement was made saying that the wreckage was from a secret military project of the time, called Project Mogul, which combined balloons with weaponry. Supposedly, the secrecy and deception was because that project was classified at the time. For some, this was case closed, and reflected a popular view that whatever crashed at Roswell was bound to be experimental and military in origin. For others, this was still more cover-up.

drop) nuclear bombs. “A popular theory among ufologists about why aliens would want to visit Earth in the first place has to do with earthlings’ sudden advance of technologies, beginning with the atomic bomb,” Jacobsen says.

Then where is the wreckage? Most ufologists and researchers assert that it was first taken to Wright-Patterson base in Ohio, and then to Area 51 in Nevada — a place so secret that, officially, it doesn’t even exist. To this day. We’ll take you there shortly.

Before we do, let us introduce Frank Kimbler, the man who has taken DCM to the crash site. Kimbler caused something of a stir when he said he had found metal at the site with “otherworldly properties”. So what’s his story?

### EVIDENCE FOUND?

One of the interesting things about people drawn to this sort of story is that they are not always the out-there, conspiracy-frazzled, paranoid Unabomber types that you might expect. Kimbler is, at heart, an educator with a sense of curiosity. A respected teacher at the New Mexico Military Institute, he says, “I’m an educated sceptic. I’m a scientist. Something scared the hell out of the people around here, and I have tried to look at what [that object] might be. I know it’s not a balloon.”

“They saw something up there that they refused to talk about until about 10 years ago — and many don’t want to talk about it still,” he adds. “Especially the older folks.” Kimbler’s off-road vehicle bounces over the dirt roads near the crash site. “People were told, if you talk about this, they will find your bones in the desert.” He knows Dee Proctor’s closest friend, he says, and confirms that for his whole life, Proctor never spoke to his friend

**“MANY DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT STILL. PEOPLE WERE TOLD, IF YOU TALK ABOUT THIS, THEY WILL FIND YOUR BONES IN THE DESERT”**

about what happened that night. Not the most typical response triggered by the sighting of a weather balloon.

Yet as a scientist, Kimbler doesn’t blindly follow the alien theory. “I know the government is hiding something. What, I don’t know,” he says. There are many other theories, including one that says it was a revolutionary craft built by the Horten brothers, famed Nazi-era aeronautical scientists, allegedly recruited by Stalin after World War II. “There is still the possibility that it was a German craft. Is it alien? As a scientist, I can’t put my finger on it. The only proof is the stuff I found, which needs more analysis.”

He says he figured out where the crash site was — the UFO Museum knows too but doesn’t tell people to prevent it becoming overrun with sightseers — and became a regular visitor with his metal detector. When he found fragments, he knew he needed to get them independently tested. “It looks like everyday aluminum,” he says. “So far I’ve found probably 20 pieces, most of which are like confetti.” When the first piece he sent — to the University of Arizona, by Federal Express — disappeared en route, he began to become unnerved. The other pieces, he says, “are hidden away, because I try to keep them protected. Some are locked in a vault,

LEFT: TWO AIR FORCE OFFICERS EXAMINE AND IDENTIFY METALLIC FRAGMENTS FOUND BY RANCH HAND WW BRAZEL NEAR ROSWELL, IN NEW MEXICO, AS PIECES OF A WEATHER BALLOON. SOME PEOPLE ARGUED LATER THAT THE PHOTO WAS STAGED



## WHERE TOURISM MEETS CONSPIRACY

The International UFO Museum and Research Center is a serious place, despite the little green men painted on the front. Its library is sufficiently professional to be linked to the Library of Congress, and researchers here take their work seriously.

And then you go to the gift shop and find the alien toilet paper. "Designed for hard-to-reach areas like Area 51," it says. "Also good for areas 1 or 2." It sits between the alien fridge magnets, greeting cards, test tube slime, alien eggs, alien driver's licenses, water bottles, jigsaw puzzles, shot glasses, mugs, golf balls and towels.

The research centre, and the annual Roswell festival, show the uneasy connection between what for some is a vital area of rigorous study, and for others an exercise in kitschy goofiness.

In the temporary absence of museum curator Julie Schuster, the museum's main spokesman is its librarian, a man called Mark Briscoe. He is sanguine about this tension between research and commercialism, noting that the museum receives around 180,000 visitors per year. The larger part of his job is academic, logging around 1,000 reported UFO sightings from around the world each week whose

details are sent to him for collation, and preserving the collection of books and documents here with a rigour that would do the Smithsonian proud. Yet he fully acknowledges the need for the commercial side. "The economic impact it has on this community



is really mind-boggling for one little old museum," he says. "You are looking at up to US\$20 million a year."

Originally, the museum ran on donations and volunteers, but that became impractical as the museum grew. "To be able to expand and add to the museum, we have the gift shop, and that's where 85 to 90 percent of our money comes from. So, yes, we have capitalised on that side, but people don't donate what you might think, and we employ 15 to 20 people full-time."

Naturally, his job brings him into contact with people whose ideas are a long way from the mainstream. "I deal with

some of the most brilliant minds in the world," he says. "And then I deal with that person who fell out of a 120-metre tree, hit every branch on the way down, and bounced when they hit the ground."

Briscoe is a fascinating man to be working in a place like this. He has three degrees, one in psychology, and has been a successful college professor. He is conservative, a practicing



southern Baptist, and a man who worries about declining standards of punctuation and the throwaway mentality of today's children (the first several minutes of the interview are spent bemoaning the fact that nobody mends toasters anymore). He is devoted to the craft of document preservation, imposing standards so high that the museum is linked to the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian, and is



receiving exhibit material from NASA. He is normal.

Yet his notion of craziness has changed. We observe that people tend to see it as a mental health issue when someone

talks about a level of consciousness beyond accepted science, and that perhaps we're missing something. He observes: "You know, I would never have felt that way until I worked here. I would have thought they were all crazy. But it makes you sit back and think: *maybe*."

His experience working with children with autism, who tend to have a mix of brilliance and social incompatibility, has helped him to reconsider what he thinks of people. "I'm a very open-minded person. I try to take a little bit of everything and come up with something rational and halfway intelligent within my own beliefs."

Certainly, many of the people involved in the annual festival sit on the very threshold of the free-thinking and the mad. The bio of one speaker, called Amariah, includes this line: "Amariah now makes telepathic contact with many different beings including archangels and extraterrestrials."

The downside of all this attention, says Frank Kimbler, an ufologist who teaches at the New Mexico Military Institute, is that it removes any sense of serious inquiry. "The problem with Roswell is that with anything about

UFOs, the universities don't want their name associated with it," says Kimbler. "Other scientists have met with ridicule. There are lots of flaky people out there."

PHOTOS: CORBIS; CHRIS WRIGHT (MERCHANDISE)

others in various places. People have scared me to death with this stuff." He has noted an abnormal level of viruses on his computer since his discovery, and on one occasion a laser was shone through the windows of his home. "Any time you have something to do with UFOs, people just go crazy."

Still, he got one fragment tested by representatives of the aerospace entrepreneur Robert Bigelow, who analyse things like this for free, on the condition that they get to keep a copy of meaningful results in the hope that they can reverse-engineer them. Kimbler drove to Austin, Texas, for testing. It was a fraught occasion. "In Austin I was so paranoid I slept with a gun under my pillow. I drove nearly all night to get back from that. When people tell you stories, you begin to believe it."

The results indicated the presence of aluminum, silicon and magnesium, superficially similar to the alloys we use to make aluminum cans, or aircraft. Not a weird alien element? "I'm not sure there are unknown elements," Kimbler says. "Every element that's out there, it's here too. The stuff that stars are made of, and what we're made of, it's going to be on other worlds too. The magical part is, the ratios of how these things match together."

Which is the crucial point. Metals have things called isotope ratios. The standards for magnesium, for example, are 24, 25 and 26. "On Earth, those ratios don't vary. It's a fingerprint for

**"IN AUSTIN I WAS SO PARANOID I SLEPT WITH A GUN UNDER MY PILLOW. I DROVE NEARLY ALL NIGHT TO GET BACK FROM THAT"**

Earth. No matter where you go on the planet, it's the same ratios, plus or minus a few parts per million," he says. "But if you get a meteorite or a moon rock, those ratios are off. You can tell something is extraterrestrial by the ratios."

And Kimbler's ratios? "In my samples, the ratios were off significantly." They fell just within the margins of error, so the findings were inconclusive and demand further research, which he has under way right now. In fact, one such independent study should have taken place by the time you read this; at the Roswell UFO festival in July, in front of an audience for verification, using an analysis machine called a Niton.

Kimbler is smart, pragmatic and good company. But getting into this field attracts a lot of attention from all ends of the spectrum: "The debunkers get on my back like a field day," he admits. He has several enemies among the UFO scientist community too, since as a sceptic, he speaks out when he finds something dubious. One noted scientist refuses to speak to him, since Kimbler publicly said he thought the researcher's alien discovery was a pot pie plate.

Then there are the overbelievers — particularly at UFO festivals. "You get the most contorted, oddball people who have ever walked the planet. Some believe they are from another world. 'I was in a Pleiadian ship and travelled the galaxy.' What have you been smoking?" As we bounce back along the dirt tracks near the crash site, the glove box repeatedly popping open as the suspension judders and slams, we pass some of the sights revered by ufologists: a windmill near the site, a corral and ranch building where Brazel first put the wreckage. It is a peaceful, empty place, but only because nobody generally discloses where it is. "The problem," Kimbler says as we turn south, "is that everybody and his dog is all over Roswell."

### AREA 51

Two days later, DCM is driving across Nevada in the fading twilight when a road sign is caught in the headlights: Extraterrestrial

## ALIENS, NUCLEAR SCIENCE, AND OUR WORLD



1898

### THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

H. G. WELLS' NOVEL, *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS*, IS A FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE OF EARTH BEING INVADIED BY ALIENS. EVEN MORE FAMOUS PERHAPS, IS ORSON WELLES' ADAPTATION, WHICH CAUSED PANIC WHEN BROADCAST ON NATIONAL RADIO IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1938. A MORE RECENT TAKE IS THE 2005 FILM *WAR OF THE WORLDS*, WHICH STARRED TOM CRUISE. CLEARLY **THE STORY HASN'T LOST ITS IMPACT**

1895-1945

### FROM ATOMS TO ENERGY

IN THE LATE 1800s AND EARLY 1900s, PHYSICISTS WERE HAVING A FIELD DAY IN THE ARENA OF ATOMIC SCIENCE. FOR THOSE THAT DON'T KNOW, **NUCLEAR FISSION** RESULTS IN THE RELEASE OF NEUTRONS, CAUSING FISSION IN OTHER NUCLEI. THIS LEADS TO **A SELF-SUSTAINING CHAIN OF REACTIONS** THAT PRODUCE MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF ENERGY. THIS EVENTUALLY LED TO BOTH **THE ATOMIC BOMB AND NUCLEAR POWER**

1942

### THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

FEARING THAT NAZI GERMANY WOULD BUILD AND USE A NUCLEAR WEAPON DURING WORLD WAR II, THE UNITED STATES MILITARY SET UP **THE MANHATTAN PROJECT** IN 1942. ORIGINALLY BASED IN MANHATTAN, NEW YORK (HENCE THE NAME), THE PROJECT INVOLVED THREE MAIN FACILITIES, ONE OF WHICH WAS **LOS ALAMOS LABORATORY**, IN NEW MEXICO. IT WAS HERE THAT **THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS WERE PUT TOGETHER** — FOUR IN TOTAL, TWO OF WHICH WERE USED ON JAPAN

1950s

### B-MOVIES GALORE!

IN THE 1950s, SCI-FI AND HORROR B-MOVIES (LOW-BUDGET MOVIES) FLOURISHED. MANY SCHOLARS THINK THEY **REFLECTED SOCIETAL FEARS** IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE TIME, WHICH REVOLVED AROUND COMMUNISM AND NUCLEAR RADIATION. AN EXAMPLE YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD OF IS THE 1956 FILM, *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, BASED ON *THE BODY SNATCHERS*, A NOVEL BY JACK FINNEY, WHICH INVOLVES **RESIDENTS OF A TOWN BEING REPLACED BY EMOTIONLESS "POD PEOPLE"**



1962

### THE HULK

THE HULK FIRST APPEARED IN 1962 IN THE COMIC *THE INCREDIBLE HULK*, AS THE SUPER-STRONG **ALTER EGO OF MILD-MANNERED DR BRUCE BANNER**. THIS IS A RESULT OF **EXPOSURE TO "GAMMA RADIATION"** AND BANNER TRANSFORMS INTO AN "ENORMOUS GREEN RAGE MONSTER" (SAID TONY STARK IN *THE AVENGERS*) WHEN UNDER EMOTIONAL STRESS



Highway. The sign is festooned with graffiti, but rests in a wholly nondescript place — Route 375, a sparsely travelled road some way north of Las Vegas, stretching north-west across the desert in the general direction of Reno. Extraterrestrial or not, very few come this way. Just two cars pass us over the next 60 kilometres.

After a whole lot of windy desert, Route 375 passes through Rachel, Nevada, a town so small that the GPS refuses to believe it exists. And there is not much here. But what there is, cannot be missed. Bright, flashing lights — from a distance it looks like a traffic accident — and what appears to be a flying saucer suspended from the back of a truck. This is the Little A'Le'Inn, which, if you say it enough times, tells you both that it is an inn, and is about aliens.

Stepping into this place at night is quite something. Images of aliens cover the walls. There's a long bar, with thousands of dollar bills stuck to the ceiling, all adorned with messages from people who have come this way. We are here because Rachel is the closest town to the fabled Area 51 — though even that's a difficult claim to pin down, since the government has never formally acknowledged that Area 51 actually exists.

## AFTER A WHOLE LOT OF WINDY DESERT, ROUTE 375 PASSES THROUGH RACHEL, NEVADA, A TOWN SO SMALL THAT THE GPS REFUSES TO BELIEVE IT EXISTS

Area 51 is sort of like a Ground Zero for conspiracy theories. The name refers to a parcel of land within the Nevada Test and Training Range, which is where hundreds of atomic weapons were exploded, mainly in the 1950s, as America sought to cement its leadership in the nuclear arms race. Area 51 itself is a relatively small part of this range, near a dried-out lakebed called Groom Lake. It is undoubtedly America's most secret military facility.

What is certainly true about Area 51 is that it is a place where secret military hardware has long been tested, and still is. It is where the U-2 and A-12 Oxcart spy planes were developed, for example. There are many things that the world knows for sure about Area 51 — that it was developed to work on the U-2 plane, adjacent to land already being used by the Atomic Energy Commission; that many employees fly in and out on so-called Janets, scheduled flights of a private Area 51 commuter fleet called Janet Airlines. That the air space above it is somewhat restricted; and that there are huge poles in the desert which can be hoisted into the air with planes attached, so as to measure radar cross-sections on prototype stealth aircraft.

America works hard on its secrecy. *LA Times* reporter Annie Jacobsen wrote in her book, *Area 51*, that even in declassified documents, which began to appear since the 1990s, the name Area 51 is always redacted or blacked out, with only two known exceptions, both of which were probably oversights. In her opinion, it is a place where black operations take place, those that have extremely restricted access and knowledge. "The atomic bomb was the mother of all black projects, and it is the parent from which all black operations have sprung," notes Jacobsen.

### WHAT'S HIDDEN?

It is always tempting to think that governments keep things from us. Yet the best conspiracy theories concern things that aren't known even to presidents — and these are more widespread than one might think. "When the world learned that America had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, no one was more surprised than the US Congress, none of whose members had



PHOTOS: IMAGINE (MAIN); EVERETT/TPS/CLICKPHOTOS (MEN IN BLACK)

had any idea it was being developed," wrote Jacobsen. "Vice-President Harry Truman had been equally stunned to learn about the bomb when he became president of the United States."

According to Jacobsen, Truman had been the chairman of the Senate special committee to investigate the National Defense Program — "meaning he was in charge of watching how money was spent during the war". Yet even he had no idea about the atomic bomb until he became president, and was told by Vannevar Bush, the president's science advisor who was in charge of the Manhattan Project, developer of the atomic bomb; and Henry Stimson, the secretary of war. Jacobsen writes that much later, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, new president Lyndon Johnson would not be briefed about developments at Area 51 until a good week after he had assumed the mantle.

The Manhattan Project is a good example of how certain sinister developments can be completely missed by conspiracy theorists anyway, and just how big these can be — or at least could be in the 1940s. The Manhattan Project employed 200,000 people, scattered amongst offices and production plants, "including a [over 24,000-hectare] facility in rural Tennessee that pulled more power off the nation's electrical grid than New York City did on any given night," says Jacobsen. "And no one knew the Manhattan

ABOVE: IF YOU CHOOSE TO IGNORE THE SIGNS TELLING YOU TO KEEP OUT OF AREA 51, YOU RISK A HEFTY FINE — AND MAYBE EVEN A NIGHT IN THE SLAMMER

### WHAT ABOUT THE BODIES?

Regarding accounts of bodies in the wreckage at Roswell, the government's explanation was that there was a period of time when crash test dummies were used in test flights. When it was pointed out that this practice did not begin until many years after the Roswell crash, the government said it must be a function of time compressing memories. Those who were present at the announcement recall the room cracking up in laughter at this answer, which didn't really help, and if anything just deepened and contorted the mystery.

## ALIENS, NUCLEAR SCIENCE, AND OUR WORLD

1982

### E.T.: THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL

YOU PROBABLY KNOW THE CATCHPHRASE: "E.T. PHONE HOME" AND RECOGNISE THE ADORABLE (BUT STRANGE) VISAGE OF THE FILM'S LITTLE LOST ALIEN. DIRECTED BY STEVEN SPIELBERG, THE MOVIE DOCUMENTS HOW A LITTLE BOY, ELLIOT, FINDS AND NAMES E.T., THE ALIEN WHO JUST WANTS TO GO HOME. POIGNANT, FUNNY AND EXCITING, VIEWERS CAN'T HELP BUT CHEER THE DUO ON AS THEY EVADE CREEPY GOVERNMENT AGENTS



1993

### THE X-FILES

PROBABLY THE MOST FAMOUS TV SERIES EVER IN THIS GENRE, IT MIGHT NOT BE AN EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT AN ENTIRE GENERATION GREW UP ON *THE X-FILES*. IN ALMOST 10 YEARS, IT NOT ONLY WON 65 AWARDS, INCLUDING FIVE GOLDEN GLOBES, THIS TV SERIES IS PROBABLY THE REASON YOU FIND THE PHRASE "THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE" SO FAMILIAR. THE PHRASE WAS USUALLY FEATURED IN THE OPENING CREDITS, THOUGH OCCASIONALLY IT WOULD BE REPLACED WITH OTHERS SUCH AS "TRUST NO ONE" OR "APOLOGY IS POLICY"



1997

### MEN IN BLACK

THE WORDS "MEN IN BLACK" MAY BRING TO MIND COMEDIC, SMARTLY DRESSED AGENTS ARMED WITH FUTURISTIC TECH — THANKS TO THE 1997 FILM STARRING WILL SMITH AND TOMMY LEE JONES — BUT THE MOVIE WAS BASED ON THE POPULAR BELIEF THAT UFO WITNESSES WERE VISITED BY MEN DRESSED ALMOST ENTIRELY IN BLACK, PURPORTING TO BE GOVERNMENT AGENTS, WHO WOULD INTIMIDATE WITNESSES INTO KEEPING SILENT. WHILE THAT IS THE FAVOURED EXPLANATION OF THESE ACCOUNTS, OTHERS SAY THE MEN IN BLACK ARE EXTRATERRESTRIAL ANDROIDS SENT TO SILENCE UFO WITNESSES, CITING THEIR "ROBOT-LIKE" BEHAVIOUR AS EVIDENCE

2012

### NEW YORK CITY ATTACKED BY ALIENS — IN A MOVIE

IN THE 2012 BLOCKBUSTER *THE AVENGERS*, A TEAM OF SUPERHEROES MUST MOBILISE TO FIGHT THE CHITAUURI, AN ALIEN RACE WORKING WITH THE MOVIE'S MAIN VILLAIN, LOKI, TO CONQUER EARTH. WITH NUMBERS ON THEIR SIDE, IT TAKES A NUCLEAR WEAPON TO STOP THE HORDES OF ALIEN INVADERS. TAKE NOTE THOUGH, THE CHITAUURI ARE JUST ONE OF THE MANY EXTRATERRESTRIAL RACES IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE — AND CERTAINLY NOT THE ONLY ONES TO ATTACK EARTH

## THE MOST FAMOUS BELIEVER



Dr Edgar Mitchell is one of only 12 men to have walked on the moon. As lunar module pilot on Apollo 14, he was the sixth man to set foot on the lunar surface.

Mitchell was always an odd one out among the gung-ho astronaut corps, despite a classic Apollo background. Secretly, he agreed with friends to hold an experiment in extra-sensory perception on the way to and from the moon, to see if they could accurately interpret what he was thinking over such great distances. He would later call the results “meaningful”.

On the way back from the moon came an experience that changed his life — and which would put him on a path to the pursuit of consciousness, quantum physics, and the principle of sustainable “zero-point” energy as academic subjects for the rest of his life, collecting some unorthodox views on extraterrestrials on the way. In Tucson, Arizona, Mitchell told *DCM* about it:

### Can you describe the moment of epiphany that you felt on the way back from the moon on Apollo 14?

My tasks on the mission were roughly completed on the moon, so coming back home I could be a little bit more relaxed. Our orientation was perpendicular to the plane of the ecliptic, and rotating, which meant that every two minutes you had a picture of the Earth, moon and sun coming through the porthole, and a 360-degree panorama of the heavens. And that's pretty wild, especially since outside, the atmosphere the stars are 10 times as bright and numerous as we can see on Earth.

Add to that, through my studies at MIT and Harvard on astronomy, I knew that the star systems were what manufactured the molecules that make up our bodies. So all matter is made of star systems. We're all stardust, and we're all the same stuff. That was — that was a big wow.

After I got back, I realised that the story of ourselves as told by science was possibly flawed, because we didn't have all the answers. And the story of ourselves as told by our religious cosmologies was archaic, and probably flawed. So now that we were having this whole new picture of the heavens, and the enormity of the universe of which we know so little — it was an epiphany that we are just starting to get acquainted with what we are all about. But I didn't understand it immediately.

### Many men came back from the moon different. Do you think you would feel this way without having gone to the moon?

I don't know. But the fact is that all of us who went to the moon and looked back at the Earth agreed that if we could get political leaders to have summits in space, we would have different political systems. It is a life-changer. We might not all have had exactly the same experience, or describe it in the same way, but it would amount to the same thing. The powerful experience of reshaping Earth, and the way you look at our place in the cosmos.

### Of the 12 of you who walked on the moon, you've probably got the ideas that are furthest from the mainstream. What's been the reaction of NASA and the state?

If you're talking about NASA as an organisation, I couldn't care less. They're just people and the political system. The people who count are the ones who say, yes, I understand that experience, and I want more of that. They are interested in my noetic foundation (a group to study consciousness), and the new organisation that is digging deeper into the quantum world and the biological world. Because we see things coming out of this we



SATELLITE VIEW OF AREA 51, WHICH HOSTS A LARGE AIR BASE WHERE RESEARCH INTO CRASHED UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS AND THEIR ALIEN CREWS HAS ALLEGEDLY BEEN CARRIED OUT

PHOTOS: SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY/CLICKPHOTOS (MAIN); CHRIS WRIGHT (DR. EDGAR MITCHELL)

### UNPLEASANT ENCOUNTERS

Dr Edgar Mitchell, scientist, moonwalker, and American hero, says: “I don't think there's any question we have had ET visitors, and to a greater or lesser extent, they have had effects on us. I'm not saying it is all good. There are some accounts of abductions that don't sound so pleasant.

But maybe it is a misinterpretation. It could be that some of our visitors are not as enlightened as others — and since we have enlightened and unenlightened people here on Earth, I wouldn't be surprised if it is true elsewhere too.”

Project was there. That is how powerful a black operation can be.”

Another lesson of Area 51 is how easy it is to hide things in illogical places. Jacobsen argues this is why it was genius for the secret base to be placed in an area under the jurisdiction of the Atomic Energy Commission. “If you move a clandestine, highly controversial project into a classified agency that does not logically have anything to do with such a programme, the chances of anyone looking for it there are slim.”

But the reason conspiracy theorists really love Area 51 revolves around Roswell and UFOs. Contemporary thinking has it that whatever crashed in Roswell, its remains were taken to Area 51 (and possibly Wright-Patterson in Ohio first), where they

still reside — including the aliens. Jacobsen reckons Area 51 was so-named because the crash remains were taken there from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in 1951.

This theory gained a lot of attention in November 1989, when a 30-year-old man from Florida called Robert Scott Lazar, who said he had worked at Area 51, spoke to a news show in Las Vegas. He claimed that within an area called S-4 inside Area 51, there was a flying saucer, and that it was his job to reverse-engineer its technology, particularly its propulsion system. He said he was told that the flying saucers (there were nine) had come from another planet — and that one day, through a window, he saw a small, grey alien with a large head. Unsurprisingly, Lazar's credibility is widely doubted. Nobody

has ever been able to find records to match the engineering qualifications Lazar claimed to have, for example. Still, the long-term effects were enormous. “From the moment Lazar appeared, making utterly shocking allegations, the public's fascination with Area 51, already percolating for decades, took on a life of its own,” wrote Jacobsen. “Movies, television shows, record albums and video games would spring forth, all paying homage to a secret base that no outsider could ever visit.”

Jacobsen is an interesting example of how things like Area 51 can drive sane, measured, professional people to believe extraordinary things. Her book is a well-sourced and researched history of Area 51 and American secret weapon development

over a 50-year period. It reveals a lot of new things, including that when Bill Clinton, as president, created by executive order a committee to look into secrets kept by the Atomic Energy Commission, some programmes in Area 51 were still kept from him — on the grounds that he still did not have a need to know.

Then after pages and pages of research, comes a stunning bombshell of a claim, that there were no aliens — but instead, human test subjects, inside a Russian craft. Basing her claim on an interview with an unnamed man (who she says was one of only five people given keys to a facility containing the bodies) Jacobsen says the figures — small, with large heads and oversized eyes — were children, aged about 13, who had been

kidnapped by Josef Mengele, the Nazi who had performed horrific experiments among prisoners at Auschwitz during World War II. The claim continues that Stalin offered Mengele a chance to continue his experiments, "if he could create a crew of grotesque, child-size aviators for Stalin". Stalin then supposedly had them put in a saucer engineered by German scientists, with the hope that they would step out in America, be mistaken for aliens and cause nationwide panic. Next to this theory, perhaps an alien visit doesn't actually seem so strange.

Speaking to *DCM*, Jacobsen seems to step back a little from this claim. "I wrote a 500-page book and what almost everyone who interviews me wants to know about is the last seven pages of the last chapter," she says. Which is perhaps not surprising when those pages combine Stalin, a Nazi war criminal, flying saucers and genetically mutated mock-aliens. She asserts that she's just passing on a story she was told, but adds: "I do believe him. But I do make room, with a footnote, for the possibility that some of the information that was given to him was erroneous. Some people tell me they believe the footnote more than the story, that the information is disinformation."

In October 1939, Winston Churchill famously noted in a radio broadcast: "I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest." Jacobsen says Churchill might have been aware of the project: "That speaks to a whole other layer of Area 51 — the mystery in the riddle in the enigma. Churchill could have been talking about Area 51."

#### OFF LIMITS

In theory, the only way to see inside Area 51 is to do the following. Drive from Las Vegas up the Extraterrestrial Highway to Rachel in a stout and well-fuelled four-wheel-drive vehicle. There, go off-road — extremely off-road — up a mountain called Tikaboo Peak, 42 kilometres east of Area 51. Make sure you wear hiking boots, as you will have to walk the last few miles. Wait until dark — there's too much heat distortion from the desert to see anything

## STALIN OFFERED MENGELE A CHANCE TO CONTINUE HIS EXPERIMENTS "IF HE COULD CREATE A CREW OF GROTESQUE, CHILD-SIZE AVIATORS FOR STALIN"

in the day — taking a pair of powerful binoculars. And then wait. And wait. If you're very lucky, runway lights may suddenly appear in the dark desert night. An aircraft takes off, and by the time the wheels are up, the lights will have gone out again.

Alternatively, you can just drive right up to the perimeter of the base — which is where you can find *DCM* this morning, hurtling away from Rachel after a morning spent listening to Connie, the proprietor and daughter of the Little A'Le'Inn's founders, venting at length about how the family was deceived by the makers of the alien movie *Paul*. She is engagingly furious, though likeable.

Nonetheless, Connie has given me a map with which I can find the base's boundary. The first thing to look for is the famous black mailbox — a curious appellation, as it is now white. It is not, as is commonly believed, where Area 51 gets its mail (24 kilometres outside its own base) but instead belongs to a local rancher, who replaced the original black box with a sturdier white version, as people kept defacing or stealing from the old one. Still, the new one is swamped with graffiti and the occasional plastic alien head.

Turning off the road at the mailbox, you drive among hundreds of Joshua trees along dusty dirt roads, until you reach the edge

PHOTO PURPORTING TO SHOW A UFO. THE PHOTOGRAPHER CLAIMED NOT TO HAVE SEEN THE UFO HIMSELF, ONLY NOTICING IT UPON DEVELOPING THE FILM. MANY SIMILAR CLAIMS WERE MADE IN THE SOVIET UNION AND THE UNITED STATES DURING THE 1960S, A SYMPTOM OF COLD WAR PARANOIA

PHOTOS: SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY/CLICKPHOTOS (MAIN); NASA (APOLLO 14)



## THE MOST FAMOUS BELIEVER

didn't know before. The message is, we've got a lot to learn. And we are just getting started.

#### When you founded the noetic foundation, you mentioned there was a danger of it becoming a church

I think what you're alluding to is the fact that we create a structure around our beliefs. In my book I tell the story of my mother's healing by Norbu Chen, the Tibetan healer. The initial blush of being healed of her glaucoma, until she realised he was not a Christian [her glaucoma immediately reappeared, nearly blinding her]. These are the types of structures we erect in our mind, to account for a lot of things in our own way.

You may or may not know I have been healed of both prostate and kidney cancer by alternative means, by mind means. I'm not knocking the medical model, but what is coming out of this is that we can do an awful lot of that through our belief systems and our willingness to do things. These are ideas on the frontier of what we are talking about. And one would suspect that our ET visitors — if they have the ability to get here and we don't have the ability to get there — have a better handle on this than we do.



#### You believe we have had ET visitors?

Definitely. They have probably been coming here for centuries. The evidence may be a little sketchy, but the Bible has accounts of chariots of fire in the sky. Michelangelo's paintings contain UFOs. We had the so-called Phoenix Lights event in 1997. I don't think there's any question that we have had ET visitors.

#### What's your view on the Roswell incident?

I grew up in Roswell, have lectured there, and know the people who helped set up the museum. Without delving into specifics, yes, I do have a firm belief that we have been visited. The Roswell incident was a real live ET presence. What more can I say?

#### Well, the other side of it is the governmental...

Cover-up? Yes. At that time, I suspect the reaction was that people aren't ready for this. That people will panic. I think it has been supplanted in recent years by the fact that there is enormous profit potential in having the keys to that technology. I'm fairly confident that has been the rationale behind the secrecy in recent years. We'll have to see where this goes in the future — open it up, make it public. We are going to need their technology if we are going to go off this planet and continue to survive. Because we can't survive on this planet the way we are doing it. We're on a non-sustainable course.

You're probably one of the most respected people to believe in UFOs. Is it helpful when a voice like yours is saying this? Somebody's got to lead. And since we're dealing with a real phenomenon, that's how I try to talk about it. How do you use it, how do you benefit from it?

of the base — where there is no fence. The most secret installation in the United States has no fence.

Instead, there are little orange markers in the scrub, and some signs. You can make out cameras and other instruments amid the cacti. And on top of a nearby hill sits a white four-wheel-drive truck, its occupants from a private security firm, watching you silently as you ignore the signs and take pictures. The whole thing seems at first so benign, it is tempting to go right on in to the base. But this would be inadvisable. Connie



tells me that some idiots have taken the view that nobody would incarcerate a child, so have encouraged their kids to jump past the signs. This was a spectacularly bad call, and the children were indeed detained. Generally, the penalty for a first offence is a US\$600 fine, and possibly a night in a cell, once you are turned over to the local sheriff.

The guys in the white car work for a defence contractor called EG&G, a central part of the Area 51 mythology. In previous years, Jacobsen writes, EG&G's jobs included taking millions of stop-motion photographs of nuclear bomb explosions, and testing the radar images of secret new jets. She claims it was also involved in a simulation of a crash in which radioactive particles were dispersed across Nevada (the 57 Project): "Not until as late as 1998 was the top layer of earth from Area 13 (the test site) scraped up and removed," says Jacobsen. "By then, earthworms in the area, and birds eating those earthworms, had been moving plutonium-laden soil who knows how far for more than 40 years."

It is perhaps natural that Area 51 should have become a place around which ordinary people thought that they had seen UFOs. Every plane developed there has been, by definition, something nobody else had ever seen before — supersonic weird-shaped jets flying around are always bound to alarm the natives.

And it has suited Area 51's management to let this idea gather pace, as it diverts attention away from the genuine secret military projects housed there. "Many citizens believed the government was trying to cover up the existence of extraterrestrial beings," says Jacobsen. "People did not consider the fact that by over-focusing on Martians, they would pay less attention

to other UFO realities, namely that these were sightings of radical aircraft made by men." According to Jacobsen, one former employee told her: "We worked under a code that said, 'What you learn here, leave here.' That was pretty simple to follow. You couldn't afford to talk. You'd lose your job and you'd be blackballed. So instead, my wife and family thought I fixed TVs." This man described arriving at Area 51 as "like I was arriving on the far side of the moon".

Area 51 even fits into moon landing conspiracies, with some people believing the landings were filmed in Nevada. "As of 2011, the lunar landing conspiracy is one of three primary conspiracies said to have been orchestrated at Area 51," notes Jacobsen. "The other two that dominate conspiracy thinking involve captured aliens and UFOs, and an underground tunnel and bunker system that supposedly exists below Area 51, connecting it to other military facilities and nuclear laboratories around the country." It has even been woven into the Greenbrier bunker story — a huge facility more than 200 metres below the Greenbrier resort in the Allegheny Mountains in West Virginia, a fantastic example of a conspiracy theory turning out to be true. In short, Area 51 is truly where conspiracy theories meet.

#### STILL OUT THERE

Driving north from Area 51 towards what Nevada cheerfully calls the Loneliest Road in America, there is a lot to reflect upon. Perhaps the most surprising idea we have heard from people engaged in uncovering conspiracies for a living is that there are some things we just don't need to know.

**"THERE ARE SOME MILITARY SECRETS THAT ARE A TRUE THREAT AND THEY DON'T TELL US FOR FEAR OF PANICKING US"**

Mark Briscoe at the International UFO Museum and Research Center in Roswell (who says, "I believe we are visited by extraterrestrials on a daily basis") is quite conservative about the freedom of all information. "I do believe we have a right to know about things. But there's some things we just don't need to know," he says. "There are some military secrets that are a true threat and they don't tell us for fear of panicking us."

Even on the subject of Roswell, he does not call for greater disclosure — despite running a research centre within a museum devoted to exactly that. "People want to know why the government doesn't come

IF YOU'RE GOING DOWN THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL HIGHWAY, LOOK OUT FOR THE LITTLE A'LE'INN (PICTURED LEFT), WHERE YOU CAN GRAB A BITE, HAVE A DRINK — AND PICK UP SOME SOUVENIRS BEFORE YOU CONTINUE ON YOUR WAY

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (MAIN); AFP (LITTLE A'LE'INN)

#### ALIENS AND "THE MAN"

The government and the tourist industry that has grown up at Roswell get along surprisingly well. NASA's contribution to the International UFO Museum and Research Center is telling, and the military have no problem with the Little A'Le'Inn. There, the proprietor relates that when her father died and she lacked a flag to put at half-mast, the military provided one. Recently, a reunion of U-2 spy plane pilots chose the Little A'Le'Inn as their venue. A waitress tells DCM she was mortified to discover that a cheeky patron she had clouted over the head turned out to be an espionage hero.

out and tell the truth. I hate to say this, but I think 20 percent of the total population couldn't handle the truth." Briscoe, as does Jacobsen, goes on to talk about about Orson Welles' notorious *War of the Worlds* broadcast in the early days of American radio. Following a mock newscast of an alien invasion, it took days for the panic to subside from people who thought it was real. "We still have people today who will follow the idiot off a cliff," says Briscoe.

Jacobsen's professional career, largely at *The Los Angeles Times*, has been devoted to unearthing military secrets. Yet even



she does not believe everyone has a right to know everything. "What I had the most trouble reconciling as I was researching the story is exactly that," she says. "A parallel system of secret-keeping is not the way the constitution was written. People call it an unanswerable authority — and I don't think anyone could argue that's a democratic situation. But there have been some very patriotic, admirable espionage programmes from Area 51 that have kept America safe."

She recalls an incident when America came close to war with North Korea after a US ship was captured by its navy. A U-2 was

sent to see if the North Koreans were lining up for war. "They weren't, so that situation was diffused because of a secret spy plane project from Area 51. There, top secrecy no doubt kept America safe."

One more thought for the road. Perhaps by focusing on flying saucers, we blind ourselves to some other, perfectly good conspiracies. "Approximately 600 million pages of information about the government's post-war use of Nazi criminals' expertise remains classified as of 2011," says Jacobsen. "Many documents about Area 51 exist in that pile." ●