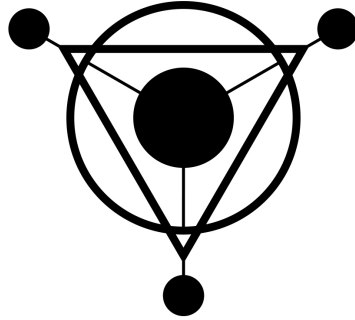


**The Silver Archive #5**  
**DARK SKIES**



**By Matthew Kresal**

THE SILVER ARCHIVE  
DARK SKIES  
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To Emily

# Overview

Title: Dark Skies

Creators: Brent V. Friedman, Bryce Zabel

Original UK Transmission Dates: From 13 January 1997.

Running Times: Pilot (120 minutes).  
18 episodes (60 minutes).

Regular Cast: Eric Close (John Loengard), Megan Ward (Kimberly Sayers), J.T. Walsh (Captain Franklin P. Bach)

Guest Cast: Arell Blanton (General Nathan F. Twining), Tim Kelleher (Jim Steele), James F. Kelly (Robert Kennedy), T.J. Kennedy (Allen Dulles), Charley Lang (Dr. Halligan), Conor O'Farrell (Lt. Commander Phil Albano), Jack Lindine (Jack Ruby), Grant Mathis (Pyne), Jeri Ryan (Juliet Stewart).

Critical Responses:

'With an increasing number of puzzling UFO sightings occurring now on a seemingly routine basis (and in front of thousands of urban witnesses, it seems), and interest in conspiracy theories unabated, maybe the time is right to bring back this clever gem.'

[Paul Mavis, 'Dark Skies: The Declassified Complete Series', *DVDTalk*]

'The truth is out there somewhere, as we all know, and the truth as uncovered by "Dark Skies" is that it's possible to clone "The X-Files" without having to pay Chris Carter a finder's fee.'

[Ray Richmond, 'Dark Skies', *Variety*]

## Synopsis

In 1960s America, **John Loengard** and **Kim Sayers** discover that much of 20<sup>th</sup> century history as it is popularly believed to have occurred is, in fact, a lie. With aliens working covertly behind the scenes since the 1940s, protected by a cover-up at the very highest level of American government, Loengard and Sayers dedicate themselves to stopping the plans of the alien **Hive**, while also keeping out of the clutches of the secret government agency, **Majectic-12**, led by **Captain Franklin Bach**.

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# Chapter One: Need to Know

Across its nineteen episodes, **Dark Skies** drew heavily on the UFO phenomenon and its associated conspiracy theories for inspiration and storylines. Indeed, the basic premise of the series, involving the secretive government agency known as Majestic, is owed entirely to one of the most well-known of UFO-related conspiracy theories. The blurry line between fact and fiction was to become a hallmark for the series.

Just how much creators Brent Friedman and Bryce Zabel did so is only apparent when looking at the series as a whole.

## Majestic 12

‘This is Majestic, the highest level security organization you have never heard of.’

- Captain Frank Bach (J.T. Walsh) in episode one *The Awakening*

At the heart of the series is an agency of the United States government known as Majestic. This organisation, led by Navy Captain Franklin P. Bach, was founded in 1947 at the dawn of the modern UFO phenomenon. Its objective is to prevent a clandestine extraterrestrial invasion of Earth. They do so while also keeping the public and American government from discovering that fact. It is with this shadowy organisation and its secret war that John Loengard and Kimberly Sayers become involved.

Like much of the series, Majestic has a basis in real life or (at the very least) in the real world of the study of the phenomenon known as ufology. The origins of the supposed government agency can be traced back to 1984, when the Los Angeles-based television producer and ufologist Jaime Shandera received a package postmarked in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Inside was a roll of 35mm film that contained images of a series of eight documents.

These documents have since become known within the UFO field as ‘The Eisenhower Briefing Document,’ allegedly having been put together as a briefing for President-Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952. The document detailed ‘Operation: Majestic Twelve’, an initiative that President Harry S. Truman had launched in the summer of 1947 following the discovery of an alleged crashed extraterrestrial spacecraft outside of Roswell, New Mexico. The goal of this operation was to bring together a group of twelve people to investigate the crash and reverse engineer the technology found within it.

Shandera brought fellow ufologists Bill Moore and Stanton T. Friedman into his confidence, and the trio began working in secret on the authenticity of the documents. In 1985, following a lead to the National Archives, the team uncovered what came to be known as ‘The Cutler/Twining Memo.’ Said to be from General Twining to President Eisenhower's assistant Robert Cutler and dated July 14, 1954, it referenced a planned briefing involving the alleged group. It was with this evidence, and knowledge of the documents being leaked to UK researchers, that the trio went public in 1987.

In the three decades since, there has been tremendous debate both inside and outside of the UFO community about their authenticity. Friedman, who passed away in 2019, became the more vocal defender of the documents and laid out the history of his authentication process in his 1995 book *Top Secret/MAJIC*. Meanwhile, UFO skeptics such as Phillip K. Glass, and even some in ufology have decried the documents as hoaxes.

Whatever the case might be for the true nature of the Majestic Twelve documents, they certainly had a strong influence on **Dark Skies** as a series. Majestic fits into the trope of ‘sinister government agency.’ Its existence is a secret known only to its employees and to its committee of twelve leading members, including Bach as well as real-life figures such as Senator and later Vice President Hubert Humphrey, CIA director Allen Dulles, and eventually Robert F. Kennedy. As is stated in *The Awakening*, before leaving office, President Eisenhower gave the agency permission not to tell future Presidents they even exist.

Perhaps as a result, Majestic can be seen as something of a commentary on many of the American intelligence agencies founded during the Cold War, whose existence has continued well into the twenty-first century, such as the CIA. In addition to the creation of both the CIA and Majestic in 1947, they also share Allen Dulles, who was the head of the former agency from 1953 to 1961. In **Dark Skies**, he serves as a member of the committee of twelve, so perhaps it's not surprising that Majestic bears some of the hallmarks of his time as CIA director.

The development of Majestic as an agency across the season certainly bears that out. The experiments to perform what is termed 'cerebral evictions' and later ARTs (Alien Rejection Technique) on members of the public and its agents echoes one of the CIA's most infamous programs. Launched by Dulles, MKUltra ran for two decades and saw the agency experiment with mind control, behaviour modification, and drugs in search of new interrogation techniques. While the exact scope of MKUltra is unknown due to the deliberate destruction of CIA files in 1973, some facts are known. Experiments often used unsuspecting members of both the American and Canadian public as test subjects, even including some of the CIA's own personal – most infamously Dr. Frank Olson who plunged to his death from a New York City hotel room in 1953 after being dosed with LSD<sup>1</sup>. Given the sometimes violent nature of Majestic's experiments in the series, the connection certainly seems likely.<sup>2</sup>

With the increased threat from the Hive, the alien species which is implanting its ganglion creatures into human beings, Majestic's mission grows in scope throughout **Dark Skies'** run. It becomes involved with international events, including the Vietnam War in *White Rabbit*, with the agency gradually deriving more and more of its funding by skimming off funds from various military agencies. *White Rabbit* also reveals the existence of a sister organisation to Majestic based inside the then Soviet Union, known as AURA-Z. This Soviet agency comes to the fore in the series' penultimate episode *Strangers in The Night* when it is revealed to have been infiltrated by the Hive. Majestic is also seen investigating the anti-war and hippie movements that came to prominence during the latter part of the 1960s – both groups which the CIA was involved in investigating illegally as part of an effort to expose their links to foreign governments.

While it owes its name to a potentially fictitious organisation drawn from the world of ufology, therefore, the Majestic organisation of **Dark Skies** owes much to the real world. Its activities and secretive nature, as well as its dubious morality, are comparable to the CIA of the era. Indeed, it certainly bears more similarities to its real-world Cold War era counterparts than it does to its namesake.

## The Roswell Incident

Still, though the agency bares its share of similarities to the real world, its basis very much remains in the realms of ufology. To that end, the Majestic of both potential fact and fiction came into existence as a result of events in the New Mexico desert in 1947, best known as the Roswell Incident.

First resurfacing in the late 1970s following the research done by Friedman, this has become one of the most investigated and debated elements to come out of the field of ufology. It has also grown — thanks to **Dark Skies**, **The X Files**, and films such as *Independence Day* and the TV movie *Roswell* — into perhaps the most famous UFO-related event of the twentieth century.

Since the book *The Roswell Incident* was published in 1980, details of the incident have differed from account to account, but a basic summation of the affair is possible. In late June 1947, New Mexico rancher Mac Brazel came across strange debris on a property he was working to the north of the town of Roswell. Being in a remote region of the American Southwest, it was not until nearly three weeks later that Brazel brought the debris to the sheriff's office in town after thinking he might have come across a crashed flying saucer. The sheriff's office contacted the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF), which, at the time, was home to the world's only nuclear-capable military unit. Two men were sent out to investigate, including the base's intelligence officer Jesse Marcel.

It is here that the timeline and exact nature of events becomes murky. What everyone can agree on is that a statement was issued by the RAAF on July 8th that announced to the world that the 'many rumors regarding the flying disc became a reality yesterday when the intelligence office of the 509th Bomb group of the Eighth Air Force, Roswell Army Air Field, was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disc through the cooperation of one of the local ranchers and the sheriff's office of Chaves County.' Roswell instantly became famous, though only until a hastily convened press conference the very next day at the Army Air Force base in Fort Worth, Texas where the crashed flying saucer became a weather

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<sup>1</sup> In 1975, following revelations in the so-called Rockefeller Commission Report into the CIA, President Gerald Ford formally apologized to the Olson family for the American government's role in Olson's death. (*New York Times*, 22 July 1975)

<sup>2</sup> For more on MkUltra and other government-sponsored mind control experimentation in the period, see Driscoll, Paul, *The Silver Archive #4: Stranger Things Season 1* (2019).

balloon.

The story disappeared until the 1970s, when Marcel began speaking to researchers, and the case soon became synonymous with both the idea of alien visitation and a potential UFO cover-up, despite attempts by the Air Force to explain the events as a combination of an errant classified balloon project and subsequent crash-test dummy tests conducted throughout the 1950s and 1960s<sup>3</sup>.

As one might expect, Roswell is at the centre of the series' backstory. References to Roswell and Brazel occur in *The Awakening*, with Bach showing Loengard both a piece of the Roswell wreckage and one of its deceased alien pilots. Later in the same episode, the discovery of a ganglion during the autopsy of Elliot Grantham causes Bach to have Majestic agent Popejoy pull out the sample taken from one of the grey aliens to reveal the connection between the events. The discovery of 'Patient Zero,' as Grantham is dubbed, becomes the second significant UFO event to take place within the universe of the show.

It is not until the second episode, *Moving Targets*, that the series presents what happened at Roswell. Through a series of flashbacks, Loengard – and viewers – learn that the RAAF was the site of an encounter between US government and military leaders and a grey alien, with Bach and Marcel in attendance alongside top level officials including Secretary of Defense James Forrestal and President Truman. It is with Truman that one of the greys communicates, the extraterrestrial demanding the immediate and unconditional surrender of humanity. It's a demand that is refused by Truman at the suggestion of Bach, who is appointed to 'go on the offensive.' The meeting ends with the grey returning to the ship, which is then fired upon and successfully brought down by the assembled forces, effectively marking the beginning of hostilities against the Hive.

The series further cements the Roswell connection by featuring one of its major players as a recurring character. Introduced in *Moving Targets*, Jesse Marcel meets Loengard in Texas shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy. Marcel is in possession of the artefact stolen from Majestic that is solid proof of everything the agency has been covering up. As well as his involvement in the events of that episode, Marcell returned in the mid-season episode *Hostile Convergence*, teaming up with Loengard following New Mexico policeman Lonnie Zamora's own UFO encounter in 1964.

In reality, despite his role in what was, officially at least, a misidentification of wreckage, Marcel remained in the Air Force on active duty until 1950 and remained a member of the Air Force Reserves until 1958, retiring finally as a Lieutenant Colonel. In retirement, Marcel found work as an electronic repairman. It was in this capacity that Stanton Friedman came across him in the 1970s, setting the return of Roswell to the public consciousness in motion.

The Marcel of **Dark Skies** is in retirement by the time John and Kim meet him, with flashbacks showing him at the base in 1947. Presenting him as such wasn't new, as the same retired officer thinking back to events had been the framing story of the 1994 *Roswell* TV movie (with **Twin Peaks** actor Kyle MacLachlan playing the role). In that film, Marcell had become the stand-in for researchers over the years in the same way that Kevin Costner's Jim Garrison had in Oliver Stone's film *JFK*.

And yet, the figure presented in the series is far removed from the one in the TV Movie. This Marcell isn't an active investigator so much as a witness who remains silent until approached by the Kennedys. He is a man who, paradoxically, wants to know the truth, while also not wanting to be involved, worried about what might happen to his family. He is a man who wants to be on the inside, while also not wanting to be. His return in the later episode, however, suggests a move towards the man who would be willing to discuss the past with UFO researchers in the decades that followed.

Indeed, it's tempting to consider what might have happened with the character if the programme had moved forward into the 1970s and 1980s. Would Friedman and Zabel have worked his coming forward into the narrative, as the former military man spoke to researchers like Zabel and appeared on programs such as the Leonard Nimoy hosted **In Search Of...** for example?

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<sup>3</sup> Most comprehensively, in McAndrew, James and Richard Weaver, *Roswell Report: Fact versus Fiction in the New Mexico Desert*.

## The Greys

One further link to ufology comes with the appearance of the alien race that dominates the series. It is perhaps the place where Friedman and Zabel, as the creators of the programme, played most to audience expectations. That is, in what their extraterrestrials would look like.

The short, gray aliens with large black eyes have appeared for decades in abduction cases, dating back at least to the Betty and Barney Hill case from 1961. With the release of John Fuller's book, *The Interrupted Journey*, in 1966, these little gray men began to work their way into the public consciousness. They had unquestionably done so by the time Steven Spielberg featured them in his foundational 1977 film *Close Encounters of The Third Kind*. When one was featured on the front cover of Whitley Strieber's abduction account *Communion* a decade later, staring out of shelves in bookstores around the globe, the image had become synonymous with the word 'alien'. The release of the so-called *Alien Autopsy* film in 1995 (only revealed as a hoax a decade later) as **Dark Skies** went into production only added to that impression.

The question that has faced both UFO researchers and sceptics alike has been where did this image come from? Setting aside the possibility of an actual alien encounter for a moment, tracing the origin of these short creatures is difficult. The Selenites of H.G. Wells' 1901 novel *The First Men in The Moon* could arguably fit the description, being described as having 'no nose' and 'dull bulging eyes at the side' in a manner not unlike the latterday greys. A version of them also appears in the 1906 French novel *Le Docteur Oméga* by Arnould Galopin (better known outside France by its English title *Doctor Omega*) as inhabitants of the planet Mars.<sup>4</sup>

A further potential link to the world of science fiction surfaced in 1990. Noted sceptic Martin Kottmeyer pointed in his essay *Entirely Unprejudiced* to the 1964 **Outer Limits** episode *The Bellerophon* which too featured an alien being with wrap around eyes.<sup>5</sup> Having aired twelve days before Barney Hill's first hypnosis session, it has become a common sceptical explanation for the origination point of the greys as described by the couple.

As with other elements from ufology used in the programme, the show's creators were not happy simply to make use of them as they already existed. Instead, Friedman and Zabel took their alien invaders a step further, making them puppets of the Hive itself, something hinted at with the discovery of Patient Zero in *The Awakening*. It isn't until after one of the beings is captured and has the ganglion removed from it later in the season that Majestic learns that they were infected at a point in the distant past by the ganglions who seized control of their technology. It was a step that separated **Dark Skies** from other works inspired by UFO lore, at least as applied to the greys themselves.

## Crop Circles

**Dark Skies** also makes use early on of another element of the UFO phenomenon that only entered the popular imagination more than a decade after series takes place: crop circles. These strange patterns, mostly appearing in wheat fields in England and the United States, came to the fore in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s (indeed, the term 'crop circle' was not coined until that time).

However, their history goes back far further than that. A 1678 woodcut pamphlet known as 'The Mowing-Devil' relates the story of a Hertfordshire farmer who awoke one morning to find the field he'd sworn not to mow perfectly mowed in a manner 'that no mortal man was able to do the like.' While on the surface bearing some resemblance to the latter-day phenomenon, several in the UFO field have called the comparison into question.<sup>6</sup>

Contemporaneous with **Dark Skies'** setting are the 'saucer nests' of the 1960s. Arguably the most well documented examples are the 'nests' found near Horseshoe Lagoon in Tully, Australia in January 1966. Farmer George Pedley discovered the first circle in the nest, made up of clockwise swirled reeds and measuring some 30 feet in diameter.

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<sup>4</sup> The 2013 edition of the novel from Black Cat Press notes that 'Galopin's Martians are the prototypes of the 'Greys' of today's UFO culture...'

<sup>5</sup> Kottmeyer's essay can be read online at <http://www.debunker.com/texts/unprejud.html>

<sup>6</sup> See, for example Micah Hanks in his 2019 *Mysterious Universe* article 'Circle Effect: Crop Circles and Claims of "Natural" Flattened Formations'



Further investigations revealed six different circles, some spun-anti-clockwise, others clockwise. It was these circles that David Bower, who began faking crop circles in England in the late 1970s, cited as his inspiration.<sup>7</sup>

Nor were the nests limited to Australia. Nearly three years before the Tully nests appeared, the famed British astronomer Sir Patrick Moore wrote to the *New Scientist*, attributing one such example of the phenomenon in a Wiltshire potato field to a meteorite impact. Both of these pre-date the first major wave of circles appearing in the late 1970s.

In *Dark Skies*, Majestic encounters its first crop circle in 1962 as part of the incident that reveals 'patient zero' in *The Awakening*, while *Shades of Grey* later presents a further exploration of the phenomenon. Details found in a notebook carried by an AURA-Z agent in Vietnam, coupled with the plate from *The Awakening* and Kim's experiences with the Hive, are combined to create a plan to bring down one of the enemy craft. Majestic is seen going to some effort to create a circle of their own with the understanding that the symbols the circles represent are messages to Hive craft to come to a destination or mark it for further use. Though the operation fails to bring down a saucer, it does lead to the capture of the grey.

## The Abduction Phenomenon

While crop circles per se may have come to prominence in the decade or so after *Dark Skies* took place, the series made use of a particularly controversial part of ufology that **was** becoming well-known in the early to mid-1960s: the abduction phenomenon, with its tales of sometimes-lifelong visitations by extraterrestrial beings, experimentation and even implantation. It is a phenomenon whose origins and very existence continue to be a rich source of debate, to the point that Harvard professor John Mack became involved in studying it, much to the dismay of that noted college. In 1990, following the publication of his book *Abduction*, Mack found himself at the center of an inquiry, 'the first time in Harvard's history that a tenured professor was subjected to such an investigation',<sup>8</sup> as Angela Hind noted for the BBC in 2005.<sup>8</sup> Negative publicity eventually led to the probe being dropped by Harvard, and Mack remained at the University until his death in 2004.

Even in a field as divided as ufology can be, the abduction phenomenon is an especially controversial topic. As Ryan Sprague observed in his 2016 book *Somewhere in the Skies: A Human Approach to an Alien Phenomenon*, 'While physical evidence remains scarce, accounts continue to be reported all across the world'. Sprague also quotes from abduction researcher Kathleen Marden who noted that 'There is evidence that leads me to believe contact experiences are physical', while cautioning that '...others are subjectively real but psychologically, psychically, or spiritually based.' Marden further tellingly pointed out that she believed "that we must be cognizant of the fact that human emotions, both hope and fear, can color our perception in a distorted fashion."<sup>9</sup>

The first modern abduction case, that of Betty and Barney Hill, is explicitly featured in *The Awakening*. In that episode, Loengard visits the couple as part of his research into the work of the US Air Force's Project Blue Book after the pair report their sighting (an event that did occur in real life). The Hills themselves appear as characters played by Lee Garlington and Basil Wallace respectively, who relate the basic facts of the case to Loengard during his visit to their home in New Hampshire. They make no claims of abduction, only of their sighting and missing time. This is in keeping with their making such no abduction claims in real life, until they began undergoing hypnosis sessions in 1964 which brought what was thought to be repressed memories of the experience back to them. It was material from these sessions that became the basis for the 1966 book *Interrupted Journey* and the 1975 TV movie *The UFO Incident*.

The Hills' abduction case created much of the future narrative elements for the phenomenon. Namely, a middle of the night encounter, the appearance of the greys, being immobilised (literally in Kim's case), 'missing time' in which the victim has no memory of the abduction, and experimentation before being returned. Implantation of items into abductees surfaced later, usually with the suggestion of tracking devices being placed into those taken.

The abduction phenomenon takes on more sinister leanings as the series progresses. Kim herself becomes an abduction victim later in *The Awakening* and, as we discover part of the purpose behind the abductions is to implant people with

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<sup>7</sup> Readers seeking a wider overview of the Tully Nests are invited to consult <https://oldcropcircles.weebly.com/australia-1966-tully.html> which offers images and maps of the site.

<sup>8</sup> Hind, Anglea, *Alien Thinking*.

<sup>9</sup> Sprague, Ryan, *Somewhere in The Skies*, pp199-200.

ganglia. Her experience has all the hallmarks of the classic abduction narrative.

The missing time aspect, as well as the use of hypnosis, also surfaces as a future plot point. *Mercury Rising* reveals another one of Kim's fellow abduction victims were a pair of Majestic astronauts, of whom one was 'rejected' by the Hive. Kim, vaguely aware of her memories, leads John to Florida where they encounter one of the astronauts, Ty Yount. Yount takes her to a psychiatrist who puts Kim under hypnosis. There she recounts events in a dramatic fashion, one that is not dissimilar from the experiences of real sessions with 'genuine' abductees.

The abduction and implantation subplots resurface throughout the series. John's brother Ray is abducted and implanted in *The Enemy Within*, setting the stage for a confrontation involving the Loengard family and the eldest son. It is only in later parts of the season that the reasoning behind the Hive's abductions and rejection of certain human beings (known as 'throwbacks') becomes clear, with some humans proving genetically incapable of ganglion implantation, giving a literal meaning to the final episode's title of *Bloodlines*, in which the abduction phenomenon culminates with 'Project Intruder'. In it, Carl Sagan (by now having been recruited by Bach to work for the agency) has helped track the pattern of abductions across the world to the point that he is able to put Loengard and Juliet in the place of an abductee. The abductee in question is then governor of California Ronald Reagan, with Majestic having to remove him and Nancy Reagan in one of the series more humorous uses of real historical figures, particularly when Governor Reagan says of the Majestic agents 'We can trust them, they're the government.'

Loengard is subsequently taken on board the Hive's mother ship, having taken stimulants before the abduction so he can move once there. In doing so, and despite Juliet inadvertently being taken along with him, he offers Majestic and viewer alike with their first real look inside a Hive ship, building upon Kim's remembrances in *Mercury Rising* of what it is like for those brought into the Hive's realm. All in time for the series to come to an end – building upon reports of real-life abduction cases and yet also taking matters in a direction that is most definitely unique to the series.

## Conspiracies Galore

While all of the above are parts of the world of ufology explored (if not exploited) by the series, they are not the only ones. Indeed, they are the tip of the iceberg in some respects. Among the other UFO elements and conspiracy theories explored in varying degrees throughout the series are:

- The Men in Black

The original version of *The Awakening* (referred to on the 2011 Shout! Factory DVD release as *The International Pilot*), featured Majestic's agents dressed in black suits and ties. They represented the men in black, seemingly sinister figures who have often approached UFO witnesses since the 1950s. Why do they not appear so prominently in the American broadcast of the episode or subsequently in the series? As Zabel explained in *Signal to Noise*, the documentary included with the DVD box set, this was due to the show's parent company Columbia producing the 1997 film starring Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones:

'I'd written a movie that had been produced for the Sci-Fi Channel that had Men in Black in it. I'd written a **Lois & Clark** episode that had Men in Black in it. It's like Men in Black out there in the zeitgeist. But when I made this argument to one of the executives (who shall remain nameless), that executive came down to the set, had lunch with us that and said 'If you don't get your guys out the black suits today, we will shut down your production and burn the negative.'

As Friedman observed in 2019, the 'whole experience was like the third ring of hell, because you have forces on high suddenly taking control of your life and putting you in what felt like legal jeopardy.'<sup>10</sup>

The immediate result was that the series introduced a new term: 'cloakers.' Scenes from the re-shoot, which cost \$116,000,<sup>11</sup> put Majestic agents in either military uniforms or lighter coloured suits. Despite this, certain scenes in the American broadcast version such as the initial encounter between Loengard and Majestic still feature the men in black.

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<sup>10</sup> Author interview with Brent Friedman, 4 October 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Author interview with Bryce Zabel, 3 March 2019.

- Cattle Mutilations

The episode *Inhuman Nature* centres on a series of events taking place on a farm in Wisconsin that bear the trademarks of one of the stranger sidelines of the UFO phenomenon. These cases, often involving the removal of organs and tissues from cows and other animals, came to light during the mid to late 1970s in the American Southwest, though UFO researchers have traced cases in the US at least as far back as 1963 with a potential case in England dating back to 1606. A 1979 investigation by the FBI following a request by Colorado Senator Floyd K. Haskell noted that "One has to admit that whoever is responsible for the mutilations is well organized with boundless technology and financing and secrecy."<sup>12</sup> In the episode, the mutilations as revealed to be part of a Hive cloning program to create humans who are genetically inclined towards their control.

- Black Helicopters

*The Awakening* features Loengard's first encounter with Majestic operatives, who intercept him during his drive home from his meeting with the Hills in New Hampshire. They arrive in a large black helicopter after causing interference with the radio he's listening to (a common claim made with vehicular based abductions, in a neat moment of misdirection). Black helicopters aren't necessarily connected with UFOs but do often feature in claims regarding secret societies and sinister government agencies.<sup>13</sup>

- A Secret Space Program?

*Mercury Rising* features a January 1964 test launch of one of NASA's Saturn family of rockets.

There actually was a successful launch of a Saturn I rocket that month, the SA-5, on the 29<sup>th</sup> from Cape Kennedy. In **Dark Skies** Majestic is using the rocket to hide a mission of their own, to intercept signals from the Ranger 7 space probe, but in reality, this specific launch is most famous for being the one which President Kennedy claimed would allow US booster payload lift capability to supersede that of the Soviet Union, an area in which the United States had trailed since the Sputnik launch.<sup>14</sup>

While the test flight of the Saturn V seen in the episode is an anachronism, as the first Saturn V didn't lift-off until November 1967, the notion behind the plot remains an intriguing one, as conspiracy theorists have long speculated about a classified space program controlled by the military, one possibly using reverse engineered alien technology, a suggestion supported by the claims of hackers such as Matthew Bevan and Gary McKinnon.<sup>15</sup>

As it happens, at the time the episode is set, the US Air Force was pursuing its own military space project. Announced in December 1963, the ultimately abandoned US Air Force Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL), was a program for what was, in effect, a crewed spy satellite<sup>16</sup>. Like MOL, the Midnight Wing mission seen in the episode uses a modified Gemini spacecraft piloted by a crew of Air Force pilots. Given all of these factors, Majestic's secret space program does seem to be a deliberate reference to the Air Force's space ambitions.

- Man Made Flying Saucers

When Loengard confronts Bach outside of Gary Powers' Senate hearing, the younger man alleges that Bach is covering up the fact that the flying saucers which people are reporting actually belong to the American military. The claim matches those made by various researchers in refutation of the notion of extraterrestrial visitation. The later episode *Hostile Convergence* sees an attempt by Majestic to release a fake set of blueprints connecting a recent UFO sighting to Nazi designs from the Second World War, another theory put forth by some in ufology. While there is little doubt that the Nazis experimented with anti-gravity technologies years in advance of the allies<sup>17</sup>, there seems little evidence that

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<sup>12</sup> *FBI Records: The Vault*, 'Animal Mutilation, Part 4 of 5'.

<sup>13</sup> For example, 'UFO MYSTERY: Fifteen black helicopters seen 'flying towards location of bizarre sighting.' (*Daily Express*, 29 December 2016)

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, John F., Remarks at Brooks Air Force Base, San Antonio, TX - November 21, 1963.

<sup>15</sup> Redfern, Nicholas, 'The Controversy of the "Secret Space Program".'

<sup>16</sup> Horner, V.K., *Spies in Space: Reflections on National Reconnaissance and the Manned Orbiting Laboratory*.

<sup>17</sup> Such research is documented in Nick Cook's book *The Hunt for Zero Point*.

they ever moved beyond the blueprint stage.

- Ancient Astronauts

Erich von Däniken's bestseller *Chariots of The Gods?* was not released until 1969, some two years after the setting of **Dark Skies'** finale, but the series makes some use of the ancient astronaut concepts it helped introduce and popularise. The episode *Ancient Future* takes Loengard, Kim, and ultimately Majestic to Alaska just ahead of the 1964 Good Friday earthquake<sup>18</sup>. They meet a tribe of Tlingit Native Americans and discover the legend of a friendly grey alien who fell from the sky, with one of the totem poles featuring a caricature of the alien. The episode's climax involves an attempt by Bach and Majestic to remove a crashed ship from nearby. Later episodes such as *Bloodlines* hint at further encounters between humanity and the Greys in the time before the latter became enslaved to the Hive, drawing on notions introduced by Zecharia Sitchin's 1976 book *The 12th Planet*.<sup>19</sup> Sitchin proposed the existence of a planet beyond Neptune named Nibiru, home of an alien race known as the Anunnaki. Nibiru's elliptically orbit caused it to pass by Earth every 3,600 years. In the past, the Anunnaki had interacted with primitive humans, becoming the inspiration for the deities of the same name in Sumerian mythology. **Dark Skies** essentially mashes these ideas together with the unrelated elements of ufology, making it the homeworld of the grays who had similar encounters, such as with the Tlingit tribe.

- Dallas, November 22nd, 1963

Many of the ufological elements **Dark Skies** utilises have their home in the fifteen years before its pilot takes place, to the extent that one might easily have imagined it taking place in the 1940s or 1950s. Indeed, the more recent series **Project Blue Book** (itself inspired by the longtime Air Force project that Loengard investigates in the series opener) takes place in the 1950s. So why did Zabel and Friedman choose a 1960s setting?

'One of the things we set out to do was to write something that put the two largest conspiracy theories in the world in an atom collider and fuse them together,' Zabel explained to this author in 2019. 'That would be the JFK assassination and the UFO mystery.'

The series initially does not show us the shooting itself and, outside of a brief glimpse in *The Awakening*, J.F.K himself is never featured directly, though his wife and brother Robert Kennedy appear as characters briefly in the episode. Indeed, the first mention of the assassination comes when John and Kim see the news on TV in an Oklahoma motel room after being alerted by the manager. In that respect, they find out about the events in precisely the same way that many Americans did: on television.

It is in the following episode that the series begins to tinker with the assassination and its lore. The end of *The Awakening* suggests a connection to the President's death and his wanting to reveal the Hive threat to the world. There is also the possibility of Majestic's involvement, which lingers into the follow-up episode, *Moving Targets*. It's there that we learn of the responsibility of both Jim Steele and the Hive as a whole in the slaying, in addition to plans to assassinate additional world leaders at Kennedy's funeral (as well as the lengths that the Hive and Majestic alike will go to in order to keep this secret).

It is in this episode that many people linked to the assassination are introduced as characters. As well as both Robert Kennedy and the President's widow Jacqueline, there is also Secret Service agent Clint Hill (made famous by the Zapruder film of the assassination as the agent who leaped onto the back of the limousine just moments too late to prevent JFK's death). Also featuring, and becoming a recurring character, is Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby who would himself murder alleged assassin Lee Harvey Oswald on the 24th of November. Ruby's murder of Oswald takes on a significance in the series, even going so far as to drop Jim Steele into real 1963 footage of the Oswald slaying in the style of the movie *Forrest Gump*.

From there, the assassination is a spectre that haunts the show. The Warren Commission, the official US government investigation into the shooting that took place throughout 1964, is a plot thread that stretches across the first half of

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<sup>18</sup> This magnitude 9.2 earthquake lasted just over four and a half minutes and was the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in North America, and second only to the 1960 earthquake in Valdivia, Chile, in recorded world history.

<sup>19</sup> Sitchin, Zecharia, *The 12<sup>th</sup> Planet*.

the series with frequent references to it on TV news coverage as John and Kim travel America. In addition, there are also meetings involving Bach and Dulles (who served as a member of the commission despite having been fired from his post as CIA director by Kennedy in 1961) as well as discussion by the heads of Majestic in *We Shall Overcome*, where Bach is less than forthcoming about the agency's knowledge regarding the assassination.

It is only at the end of *The Enemy Within* that Robert Kennedy once again summons John and Kim to Washington. *The Warren Omission* is in many ways the turning point of the series, showing Loengard's testimony before the commission and the reception it receives, and how far Robert Kennedy is willing to go to catch those who murdered his brother. The younger Kennedy orders a raid on Majestic's headquarters, literally blowing up the doors to get inside. Among the items the raid uncovers is a film of the assassination. Once projected, it shows the shooting; in particular, a close-up of the limousine driver picking up a gun, turning around, firing a shot, and then turning back around before speeding off.

The choice of the limousine driver as the gunman is an intriguing decision in its own right. The idea that the driver, Secret Service agent William Greer, killed the President surfaced in 1991 with the publication of William Cooper's book *Behold a Pale Horse*. Cooper put forward the theory that Greer used "a gas pressure device" to fire the fatal shot which killed Kennedy.<sup>20</sup> Cooper's proof of Greer's guilt amounted to frames from a low-quality print of the Zapruder Film, the only complete film record of the assassination, which shows Greer twice turning back to look at the wounded President.

Cooper's claims were controversial from the start. Indeed, many assassination researchers quickly debunked it, pointing to Cooper's frames' low-quality as having produced the image artifacts he was citing.<sup>21</sup> However, perhaps owing to Cooper's death in 2001 in a shootout with Arizona sheriff's deputies and despite the efforts of researchers, both the theory and its source book continue to be in circulation, perhaps helped in part by its usage in **Dark Skies**.

Robert Kennedy's determination fades quickly, however. Blackmailed by Majestic over his affair with Marilyn Monroe, the Attorney General withdraws his support from Loengard. His actions prove key to Majestic's goal: allowing the truth to sink into the shadows.

This 'grand unification of conspiracy' as Zabel came to call it, the linking of UFOs to the Kennedy assassination, was oddly prescient. In 1998, a year after the series finished airing, the book *The Majestic Documents* by the father-son research team of Robert and Ryan Wood brought to light a series of 'new' Majestic documents, thanks to researcher Timothy Cooper. One of those documents, known as the 'Burned Memo', connects Majestic and the CIA (in particular, its counter-intelligence wing) to the assassination, following requests from 'Lancer' (JFK's Secret Service codename) for information on the phenomenon. Another document, 'The Marilyn Document', linked Monroe's 1962 death to the same forces, due to her being made privy to details about the UFO cover-up.

As with the original Majestic documents from the 1980s, the authenticity of these documents has never been satisfactorily proven. Kevin Randall, the co-author of the book that served as the basis for the 1994 *Roswell* TV movie, expressed his opinion in 2002 that 'the Marilyn document is a fake,'<sup>22</sup> while even staunch Majestic believers like Friedman would acknowledge as late as a 2018 interview on the *Somewhere In The Skies* podcast that 'most of the [later] MJ-12 documents are phony.'<sup>23</sup> Even so, the documents continue to appear in works such as Nick Redfern's *Close Encounters Of The Fatal Kind* (2014), and *The Presidents And UFOs: A Secret History From FDR To Obama* (2015) by Larry Holcombe, and even appeared in a 2011 article in the UK tabloid, the Daily Mail.

Did Zabel and Friedman have some particular insight into events? Zabel denied the idea in a 2019 interview with the current author, noting that 'we did it, not because we were deeply knowledgeable about JFK and UFOs, we did it intuitively.' If anything, the show's co-creator accepted that 'I guess that's the way it kind of works. I don't if that's good or bad but that's sort of how it works.'<sup>24</sup> Despite that, the decision to tie together two of the best-known conspiracy theories of the late 20th century helped cement the show's place in ufology, even if not quite the way its creators intended.

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<sup>20</sup> Kirk, Paul, 'Govt Aids nut linked to Ku Klux Klan'

<sup>21</sup> *JFK Lancer*, 'Did the Limousine driver shoot JFK?'

<sup>22</sup> Randle, Kevin, *Case MJ-12*, p232.

<sup>23</sup> **Somewhere in The Skies**, Stanton Friedman: *The End of An Era*, 1 April 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Zabel, 3 March 2019.

## Ufology in a Snapshot

**Dark Skies** can be seen then as a culmination of decades worth of Ufology research and the mythology built up around the phenomenon. In particular, it builds heavily on elements introduced in the decade before the series aired, including its use of Majestic and its focus on Roswell as the catalyst for the series' backstory. Perhaps this isn't surprising considering that Zabel told Graham in 2015 that:

'Everything I had read in UFO literature ended up in **Dark Skies**, from Betty and Barney Hill to Majestic-12, you name it. I tried to weave it all in there.'

The **Dark Skies** mythos created by Zabel and Friedman was part of a wider 1990s cultural focus on the UFO and conspiracy phenomena. But few blurred the lines between fact and fiction as densely as **Dark Skies** did, even if the writers made such clever use of modern UFO mythology that many viewers didn't even realise it. Zabel and Friedman didn't settle for a sprinkling of throwaway references; they created tectonic plates, across which the entire programme moved

