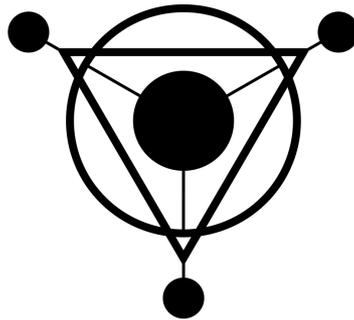


The Silver Archive #5
DARK SKIES



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 20th 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**.

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 decied 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 President's

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 famously Dr. Frank Olson who plunged to his death from a New York City hotel room in 1953 after being dosed with LSD¹. Given the sometimes violent nature of Majestic's experiments in the series, the connection certainly seems likely.²

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

¹ 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)

² 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).

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 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 1960s³.

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, Marcel 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.

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

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?