



## **Area 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base**

*Annie Jacobsen*

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Area 51 is the most famous military installation in the world--& it doesn't exist. Located 75 miles outside of Las Vegas in Nevada's desert, it's never been acknowledged by the government, but it's captivated imaginations for decades. Myths & hypotheses about it have long abounded, thanks to the enveloping secrecy. Some claim it is home to aliens, underground tunnel systems & nuclear facilities. Others believe that the lunar landings were filmed there. The prevalence of these rumors stems from the fact that no credible insiders have divulged the truth about their time inside the base--until now. Annie Jacobsen had exclusive access to 19 men who served the base for decades & are now aged 75-92, & unprecedented access to 55 additional military & intelligence personnel, scientists, pilots & engineers linked to the secret base, 32 of whom lived & worked there for extended periods. In *Area 51* she shows what's really gone on in the Nevada desert, from testing nuclear weapons to building super-secret, supersonic jets to pursuing the War on Terror. This is the first book based on interviews with eye witnesses to Area 51 history, which makes it a seminal work on the subject. Filled with formerly classified information that's never been accurately decoded for the public, *Area 51* weaves the mysterious activities of the base into a gripping narrative, showing that facts are often more fantastic than fiction, especially when the distinction is almost impossible to make.

## Area 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base Details

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## From Reader Review Area 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base for online ebook

### Jamie says

Excellent book. I don't know how Annie Jacobsen compiled the half of it. Her work is extensive and exhaustive and it's fascinating on all fronts. How could it not be, with a subject like this? But in connecting the dots of such an unwieldy story, it never bogs down. Her research is as satisfying as it is incomplete and disconcerting—the few pixels of a much larger picture. And she presents it without hype or paranoia, not even when such things could arguably be justified.

Lest you think this is 500 pages of UFO nuts: not hardly. It's our military history, our aviation history, our hubris and folly and wizardry and triumph. The nuclear program, the Cold War, the Space Race; it all connects in a few hundred square miles of desert. And yet, always, Jacobsen keeps this story focused on the human aspect, the interesting people behind these black projects instead of only the black projects themselves. It's their foibles and heroics that write history. Even history so secret it doesn't officially exist.

When she broaches the ultimate revelation of the Area 51 bible, it's her focus on the humanity of everyone involved that makes it hit hardest. It's more or less what I expected, but seeing it in print is something else. The kinds of things you would hope would be left to science fiction, and implausible fiction at that.

But no. The truth of a thing outweighs the fiction. And that's just the one pixel. Who can imagine the rest?

In sum: this is the book about Dreamland I always wanted to read. You discover that the fantastic is true, but the fantastic is human, and the worst sins are our own.

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### Thad says

Jacobsen, a national security reporter for the LA Times, spends much of the book demystifying Area 51, using exhaustive research to show that it was the key testing ground for everything from nukes to the SR-71 Blackbird to today's drones. Then she drops a theory on the Roswell crash that's nothing short of revolutionary: it all was a Soviet psy ops mission designed to freak the American people out and make them distrust the government (if so, it sure as hell worked).

It sounds far-fetched at first, but here are a few of the elements of the theory (some, it must be noted, are from a single source who was an engineer at Area 51, where the Roswell "UFO" was allegedly taken):

- parts of the inside of the craft that crashed at Roswell had Cyrillic lettering
- during WWII, German aviation engineers had developed several planes that looked like flying-saucers; at the end of the war, the US and Soviet Union had raced to track down the top Nazi scientists and recruit them. Her theory is that the Soviets got the engineers who had made the saucer-like planes, or least at the blueprints.
- the "aliens" in the crashed Roswell craft? Her theory is they were children who were the victims of human experiments, like the Nazis' (and maybe by ex-Nazi doctors working for the Russians), to make them look like otherworldly beings.
- but could children have piloted the craft(s)? No, they were probably on autopilot or remote-control, she suggests.
- why would Stalin have sent the ships towards Roswell? Because that was the site of the U.S.'s first post-WWII nuclear tests in 1946, which Moscow would have seen as a betrayal.

- where would the "UFO" planes have been launched from under this theory? Probably Siberia, and then they'd fly over the Pacific Northwest. Why is that relevant? Well, the first two major UFO sightings of the modern era were in Washington State and Idaho ... during the 2 weeks before the Roswell crash in 1947.

Anyway, it's worth a read, especially for anyone interested in Cold War military history, secrecy/transparency, and of course, the UFO phenomenon. Again, most of the book is about Area 51 as the testing ground for various weapons/aircraft, and she does a good job weaving various individuals' stories in amongst the declassified documents to paint a picture of what working there must have been like. In Jacobsen's telling, Area 51 keeps popping up and having a role in one major US foreign policy event after another.

Back to the UFO's: I think her theory is probably right. I would not be shocked if subsequent releases validate it, and 10 or 20 years from now, we look back at this book as the turning point. Our Cold War enemy launching a fake alien invasion makes a lot more sense than the "weather balloon" story or aliens actually visiting us (but never crashing or leaving any evidence ever again), anyway. The Alien Astronauts dude better start looking for a new gig.

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## Alias Pending says

Short review: "I've been saying for years: The Shadow Government already has scare-goat related disinfo hypnology." – Schaeffer T. Darklord

Medium review: I want to call this book pure propaganda. But, it is not. It's highly muddled propaganda and disinformation. I'll try to ravel this poorly told tale in the Long Review.

Long review: 1) This book is not about Area 51. It is about the A-12 Oxcart. If you want to read about the Oxcart program, I recommend you seek more coherent information elsewhere. I don't appreciate the bait and switch scam in any arena.

2) About the veracity of the author: An informed reader should check this author's name on Snopes or her Wiki entry. I'm not willing to say she is a liar. I can say she certainly sounds like someone's dupe. Someone who really hates the Department of Energy.

3) The book is also about UFOs. These UFO bits are incongruent and almost completely unrelated to the subject at hand, as if they were tacked on at a later date in the hopes of generating some sensational publicity for the rest of the book...

4) Politics. This book is an attempt to manipulate you. To what ends? I have no idea. I'm not sure who this mess of storytelling serves. Certainly not the reader. Maybe like some 1960's CIA black-op mind control experiment led by ex-Nazi scientists gone wrong, it has no point. Maybe the book was just an exercise to muddy the waters.

(lw:End)

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## Erik Graff says

A great deal has been written about the Nevada Test and Training Range, much of it disinformation, much of it rumor or nonsense. Jacobsen's Area 51, based in part on public record, in part on interviews, is an

accessible and generally accurate history of the area and what has occurred there since 1951, all of it originally secret, much of it profoundly disquieting.

Running as a leit motif throughout the book is reference to what happened outside Roswell, NM in 1947, an event finally explained in the final chapter. Here, in a section based upon the alleged testimony of one informant trusted by the author, what has hitherto been a coherent narrative falls apart. Roswell, we are told, was indeed near the site of crashed disks, recovered along with bizarre bodies, two of them still barely alive, by the military. Neither the crafts nor their occupants were, however, extraterrestrial. Rather they had been made to appear that way. In fact, they were a psychops project of the Soviets based, like our own rocketry, upon Nazi science. This story, as Jacobsen relates it, cannot possibly be true.

First, according to all accounts I have encountered, the USSR had no capacity to fly to the SW USA in 1947. If these were Soviet craft, then they must have flown in from Mexico or the sea. Whatever the case, Jacobsen writes as if range were no problem, as if they travelled from Siberia, across North America, to our most sensitive military installations.

Second, if it were a Soviet psychops intended to emulate the panic-engendering Mercury Theatre broadcast of The War of the Worlds, why was Russian writing found on one of the craft and why were they crashed in such a remote area? Such being the case the only fear that would be engendered would be in the hearts of the U.S. military leadership, fear of technological inferiority and perhaps of the perversity of the communist adversary.

Third, if the Soviets actually did have flying disks capable of evading radar detection and of traversing US airspace, why didn't they just use them like we used the U2? If the intention was to spy, then the crashes broke the secrecy and tended to defeat the purpose. Surely, if spying was the intention, then the crashes must have been accidents, but Jacobsen doesn't discuss this possibility.

Fourth, if the extraordinary disks and the bizarre creatures in them were actually the result of developments in Nazi science, how come these engineering and biological breakthroughs saw so little use or development? The German Horten prototypes pictured in the book are nowhere represented as being capable of the antics the New Mexico disks are reported to have achieved. Further, the surgical alteration of children--a practice the informant claims the USA went on to emulate--would seem to serve no practical purpose whatsoever, except perhaps the psychops one discounted above.

One could go on--and one suspects Stanton Friedman, the Roswell expert, will.

Yet, despite the thoughtless, self-contradictory sensationalism of the author's concluding chapter, the rest of Area 51 is recommended.

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## Marvin says

When this was first recommended to me, I was afraid it would be another UFO conspiracy tome. It is far from that. Of course, the author does give her attention to the UFO theories surrounding the mysterious Area 51 and, in the first chapters, teases us with the promise of an explanation. By the last chapter, we get that explanation and it is more mind-boggling and disturbing than any UFO theory could be.

But while that may be the author's most sensational claim, this is a book about the real importance of Area 51 bolstered by eye-witness testimony and a bevy of newly unclassified material. It becomes apparent that

Area 51 with all its top secret activities managed to involve itself in practically every major espionage and military event and crisis we know of since the 1950s...and many we did not know of until now.

This book is more than a history of Area 51. It is an examination of cold war politics and military rivals during the cold wars and how our paranoia affected the leaders of our country. It is a history of a dark period in history and one that still continues with different players. It is unquestionable that many of the experimental projects of Area 51 were essential to our country. But it is also scary just how many of these experiments came very close to national catastrophe. *Area 51* is essential reading for 20th century history buffs and my pick for best non-fiction book of 2011.

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### **Scott Gilbert says**

UFO and conspiracy books are a particularly guilty pleasure of mine. I believe nothing, but am entertained and thrilled by all of it. Jacobsen didn't fail me in this regard. She has piled up a fast, heated history of Area 51 and the elements of the "Military-Industrial Complex" which bred the secret base (and its matching mystery installations around the world and country). Much related here must be true, and most of it is quite reasonable and revelatory (stolen technologies, blundering atom bomb and h-bomb testing, and the grand architecture of great secrets). Jacobsen shows that everything is connected in this vicious and weird world of clandestine Nazi technology, spy planes, satellites, and radiation of all types. However, the knot in which she ties this squirming bundle of secrets with one more version of the Roswell Crash is unconvincing and arrived at with far less authority than any other part of the book.

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### **Lisa Carlson says**

This book gives complete credibility to the statement; "We have no idea of what we really don't know." Understandably, there are going to be people who think this book is worthless but what caught me is the power of the very few who go unchecked; including Presidents. To me this is more alarming than any possible alien sightings. Jacobsen begins her story with how things began and who oversees Area 51 which is located 75 miles from Las Vegas. The Air Force and Government will not acknowledge its existence. The story continues with detailed explanations about Black Operations, the CIA and Air Force Involvement, Secret Plane Developments, Pilots and other personal who have control over Area 51 and the elaborate measures used for cover-up. Much of this history will sound familiar but you may never look at past Presidents, World Leaders or government agencies with the same credibility. Annie Jacobsen has written a fascinating and disturbing account of Area 51-the Secret City.

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### **Lucybelle says**

This entire book is written in fluent clickbait. "Here's what the CIA will never tell you about their top secret drone program...number five will shock you!!!"

I can sort of forgive Jacobsen for milking the scandal factor so hard. Aviation history doesn't exactly fly off the shelves (hurr, hurr), and there's nothing wrong with sexing up the dry source material to hook in readers. Plenty of what's in this book is interesting and informative, if you're into the history of America's military-

industrial complex and willing to overlook the patronising chapterly reminders that what you are reading is Top Secret!! Never Before Revealed!! Only Declassified Yesterday!!

What I can't forgive is the Big Reveal in the final chapter. After a comparatively sensible 350 pages of well-sourced, cross-checked historical analysis, Jacobsen goes off the deep end with a lurid tale of grotesque government-backed human experimentation. Her source? An anonymous elderly man who, by Jacobsen's own report, speaks only in ominous generalisations and point-blank refuses to furnish her with any concrete details about his claims.

That is not journalism. At best it is irresponsible rumour-mongering, and at worst it is callous exploitation of some poor man suffering from untreated paranoid delusions. Jacobsen ought to know better.

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### Sean Wilson says

I really enjoyed Annie Jacobsen's effort to bring the history of *Area 51* to life through a paranoid scope, strongly highlighting the political ramifications of military experimentation and its dangerous consequences.

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### Tony says

AREA 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base. (2011). Annie Jacobsen. \*\*. I made it halfway through this recent book and stopped. There were just too many factual errors that I was able to catch that affected my credibility about anything else the author might have to say about her subject. Her claim to fame for this book was that she was able to interview nineteen people who actually worked at or for Area 51 – people who were willing to share information with her not otherwise available to the public. Unfortunately, there was no way to corroborate any of their testimony, since each provided different sets of information. In her notes to the text, she admits that that was the case for most, if not all, of her informants. That Area 51 exists is a fact. That the Area was used to develop spy planes and to train their pilots is also a fact. That, further, the Area was used as a testing site for nuclear weapons is also a fact. All of these facts were known before. It is when she gets off to saying that the base was the home of alien investigations that I have trouble with suspending my disbelief. Many of the factual errors I found in the text should be obvious to even the casual non-science-trained reader. She starts off with the radio broadcast in 1938 of H. G. Welles' "War of the Worlds." The panic it caused in the populace, she felt, led to the sensitization of the average man to technology that he could not understand. She cites jet engines, radar and the microwave oven developed during WW II. As I understand it, mostly by checking "Google", jet engines were being developed during WW II mostly by Britain and Germany, but were still unknown in the U.S. Radar was still experimental and was shrouded in great secrecy by its developers in Britain and the U.S. Apparently, Germany was not aware of the advances being made by the Allies in this technology. Microwave ovens were a product of post WW II – the heating effects of microwaves were not discovered until 1945. There is the anecdote about one of the scientists working on the technology who found that a chocolate bar in his pocket melted when he walked by a microwave generating device. I don't know if that's true, but most of us have heard the story. The author also tells us that UFO-like craft were developed by the Russians as a result of their stealing German scientists from Germany at the end of the War. This is backed up by her report from one of her informants that Russian printing was found on suspect pieces of such a spacecraft in Roswell. There are loads of misinformation like this scattered throughout the half of the book that I managed to get through. Someone should have done some fact checking prior to the release of this book.

## Marc Weitz says

This is not the Area 51 book for those of you who wear tin foil on your head. Written by a real reporter for the LA Times Magazine, this book examines fact-based accounts of Area 51. Mainly this book explains that all the crazy alien and UFO stories were the development and testing of advanced planes such as the U-2 and the SR-71 Blackbird. We know these planes exist today, but it understandable that when these planes were being developed top-secretly in the 1950's and 1960's, a plane like the Blackbird, which travels at over 2,000 mph and at 90,000 feet, could be mistaken by observers as a UFO. This makes incredible sense.

The debunking of aliens aside, this book is mainly about the pilots and engineers behind these projects. The stories of these test pilots and engineers in the context of the Cold War is absolutely fascinating. There are stories of their ingenuity and bravery. The book deals heavily also with the development and testing of nuclear bombs. The incredible numbers behind these technical advances are fascinating. The book, through interviews, tells the individual stories of those who worked at Area 51. For conspiracy theorists, there is a lot of talk about the crash at Roswell and UFO sightings. Again, these seem very reasonably explained. One interesting thing to note: The Air Force was testing an experimental airplane that was drawing the attention of other pilots in the area. To keep the story from spreading the pilots put on gorilla masks, so that any other pilots who saw them would report seeing a strange-looking aircraft being flown by a gorilla and lose all credibility. It was so simple. It is suggested that the alien story may be a cover story for another classified project along the same lines.

This is a fun and interesting read about aviation and the development of nuclear weapons.

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## Stephanie \*Very Stable Genius\* says

"Wow! It sure is hot in the desert. Hey, why does that rattle snake have two heads?"

"I can tell you....."

"Oh, hello...I didn't see you there, just talking to myself and the snake---s. I'm Stephanie, and who are you and what are you doing in the middle of the Mojave Desert?"

"I could ask you the same thing. I'm Annie Jacobson, I wrote a book about Area 51. It's just over the hill there."

"The hill with the two Hummers on it? Hey, and there seems to be a couple guys with guns.....uh.....pointing in our direction."

"Yuup, but it doesn't technically exist."

"Why? What do you mean by 'doesn't technically exist'? Those guns exist. Is it because of the aliens? Oh it's because of the aliens! I KNEW it!"

"Yes, I talk about the Roswell incident a bit in the beginning of the book, but then I get into all the crazy military secrets. What I mean by Area 51 not existing is that it has always been a Black Operation, which means our federal government denies it existence even though it sits right over there.....as you so astutely

observed."

"Thanks! So you mean the President and the rest of the government, close their eyes, stick their fingers in their ears and go LALALALALALA.....?"

"Kind of, but not really. No president has ever "known" about Area 51. Vannevar Bush, the engineer that was the primary organizer for the Manhattan Project started up Area 51 because he believed some things are on a need to know basis, and the president just didn't need to know. In fact, whoever works at Area 51 is on a need to know basis. You only know about your specific field of work and that's all. I guess no one in that place knows the whole story."

"Did you say Vannevar BUSH? Oh god! Those Bush's are freaking everywhere and they ruin everything! This explains so much....."

"There is no evidence that Vannevar and W. Have any familial ties. Relax Stephanie."

"Oh." "Sorry." "continue."

After WWII the United States government recruited Nazi scientists, because they were the best in the world, forgave all their odious crimes and set them up with pretty swanky jobs at Area 51. This was called operation Paperclip. The Soviet Union recruited some of their own. Joseph Stalin used them to come up with some inventions as well."

"Uuck! We had known Nazis on our soil doing god knows what.....and we called it Operation Paperclip? That doesn't sound very intimidating. Why not Operation Commando Eagle or something like that? What were they up to anyway? Investigating aliens, right?"

"Commando Eagle? Isn't that an Eagle without underpants?..... Anyway, they were doing all sorts of things, mostly testing nuclear bombs. Bomb after bomb after bomb.....it's a wonder the planet is still intact. It's a damn miracle any of us are alive. For one of the tests they put a bunch of sheep, rodents, and 109 beagles in cages, blew up a bomb to see how it would affect them. Turns out, plutonium is only lethal if inhaled; you can touch it, no worries. The aliens, yeah, sort of.....I tease about them again in the middle of the book to keep you reading."

"Awe, 109 beagles? They wouldn't do that kind of crap today; PETA would be all over their ass! By the way, teasing isn't nice Annie."

"I know, I'm getting to it. Couple of interesting tid bits I need to share first, when they tested some manned rockets they noticed a bunch of black dots high in the atmosphere. It freaked them out until they found out they were dead bugs blasted so high in all the thermal nuclear bomb tests they were sent into orbit. One of the scientist at Area 51 was known for inventing something that kept the astronauts penises from freezing to the urine tube when they had to pee.....and they had this spy operation they called Acoustic Kitty, where they implanted listening devices in cats, that didn't work out so well.....and....."

"ANNIE! The little grey men please. By the way, since this stuff is mostly classified, how do you know all of this information?"

"I interviewed one of the original Paperclip scientists for a year right before he died".

"So?"

"Ever heard of Occam's razor?"

"Yeah, given a bunch of solutions to a problem, the simplest one is the most plausible one."

"Right. Well....."

(view spoiler)

".....and that's why we can't have nice things Stephanie....."

"Thanks Annie, I'm scared, I think I peed myself a little. I think I'll go home now."

Also posted at shelfinflicted

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### **Anne says**

I heard an interview with Jacobsen on Fresh Air which intrigued me. Then I got a sample chapter to see if it held up to a critical reading, and I was hooked.

If all you know about Area 51 is the alien/spaceship wacko thing, then you can be forgiven for thinking that is what this is about. Rather, this investigative reporter examines the secret, "black operations" that have gone on here since the beginning of the Cold War. And what has piqued my interest the most is her detailed account of how these secrets have been kept from Congress, and sometimes even the President. This is a rogue operation, funded by our government, that has had no public oversight. That, to me, is much scarier than aliens.

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### **Dave says**

*Area 51* is a very odd book. On the one hand, much of it is a sane, grounded history of the installation's key role in Cold War nuclear testing and spy-plane R&D, full of previously undisclosed information based on declassified records and dozens of interviews with people who worked there.

Jacobsen sticks to that sensible course for about 90 percent of the book. But the other 10 percent is kind of, well, nuts. Things get weird when she links Area 51 to the Roswell incident. Based on a single, unidentified source, she spins a truly amazing tale involving a super-duper-hi-tech remote-control stealth Soviet flying saucer developed at Stalin's behest, designed by a couple of ex-Luftwaffe aeronautical-whiz brothers, and manned by "child-size aviators" who were "biologically and/or surgically reengineered children" created

by...fugitive Nazi doctor Josef Mengele!

This type of thinly-sourced, credulous reporting wouldn't pass muster at most newspapers. No doubt it wouldn't fly at the *Los Angeles Times*, where Jacobsen works as a contributing editor to its magazine. Standards are clearly different in the book world, where an author telling such a tale can confidently claim on the jacket, "This book is a work of nonfiction. The stories I tell in this narrative are real." Well, except for the ones that can't be proved.

More here.

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### **Aaron says**

[Jacobsen's treatise on Area 51's use as a nuclear testing facility during the cold war - via former Nazi engineers relocated to the U.S. during the ultra-secret Operation Paperclip - is fairly riveting. However, the next several

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### **Paige says**

This book had roughly 99% fewer aliens than I hoped for.

What are you looking for with this book? A shocking exposé of Area 51, Roswell, and UFOs? You're not going to get that. Most of this book is about the CIA and Air Force bickering over the Blackbird spy plane. The rest of this book is about nuclear testing and the Cold War. I found it interesting! It just isn't what I wanted.

So if you're looking for a book about the US government's nuclear programs, the testing stages of some of Lockheed's coolest stuff, the Cold War, and a pit stop for conspiracy theorists who claim we never went to the moon, look no further.

I do recommend this book just for the explanation of the Roswell crash. Admittedly I was laughing through this whole thing, so I may not fully understand what they were telling me, but what I gather is this: The flying disc that fell out of the sky in Roswell, New Mexico was piloted by extremely deformed children. Said deformed children were actually former test subjects of Dr. Josef Mengele, notorious Nazi "doctor" who performed experiments on concentration camp victims at Auschwitz (among other places). But where did the children come from? Russia. Stalin had a deal with Mengele. SO TO SUM UP: A Nazi "doctor" created deformed children to pilot a flying disc launched from Russia to New Mexico by Josef Stalin. A flying DISC, flown from RUSSIA to NEW MEXICO, by CHILDREN that had been experimented on. It boggles the mind.

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### **Ian says**

Nothing to Placate Mulder Here

Firstly: put away that tin-foil hat, Clarence, this has nothing to do with telling you about the bodies of alien visitors. The Roswell, NM 'incident' is debunked in this book as being nothing more than a demented attempt

by the then Soviet leader Stalin to create panic among the American public akin to the 1938 "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast. Had the original USAF Press Release not been replaced in a matter of hours, he might have succeeded. The craft was a crescent-shaped wing and created by two former Nazi scientists, and the bodies of two deformed children were inside to resemble 'pilots', the craft being actually controlled as drones are today.

So that's that.

Now: Area 51, however, DOES exist. It's been used since the early '50s as a testing location for a stream of planes being developed by both the CIA and the USAF for reconnaissance and combat purposes. The U-2, then the A-12 / SR-71 were both developed there, as was the F117 'Stealth Fighter'. Most recently they've used the area to develop military drone technology without the public being aware of things until they've been deployed (although the CIA will neither confirm nor deny anything about the devices).

The history of the development of the facility, the reasons therefore, and the various political and national influences on its continued use is fascinating and far more interesting than any "my sister was abducted by aliens" theory spouted by a fictional FBI agent might be.

The final chapter and epilogue declares what the actual answer to the 'alien body' question might have led to, and — to be frank — it's hoped that the author has been sold a tissue of lies by an old man. Were the matter as terrifying as is claimed (no, still no aliens; it's all human), it's no wonder no one wants to open that Pandora's Box. While not convincing in its arguments, the real project resulting from Roswell would make the Iran / Contra affair, the Pentagon Papers, and Nixon's recordings together look like harmless, week-end pranks. I don't WANT to believe the answer.

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## Eric\_W says

Annie Jacobsen is obsessed with secrecy. Her other book, Operation Paperclip, deals with the hidden machinations of the US government after WW II to find and import Nazi scientists who had special expertise in rocketry and chemical weapons.

This book details the hidden history of Area 51, an ultra-secret location (officially it doesn't exist) in the Nevada desert just next to the atomic weapons testing area. Supposedly created by the CIA in 1955 for U-2 flights, Jacobsen discovered it had been set up by the Atomic Energy Commission to conduct tests some might consider to be unethical on animal subjects. The secrecy of the Manhattan Project, an effort unknown to Congress and even the Vice-President --Truman was briefed on it only after he assumed the presidency, -- was adopted as SOP by the CIA, NSA, and AEC to the point where one might argue the United States had a shadow government run by the military.

Jacobsen's entry into this world came by chance when she met Edward Lovick, an 88-year-old physicist, who suggested he might have an interesting story for her and connected her with other elderly pilots, engineers and scientists regarding the plane known as Oxcart (the A-12) which had been created half a century earlier.

Some of the secrecy was arguably quite necessary since it related to aerial surveillance that ostensibly helped keep the world from nuclear holocaust. Whether even in hindsight this kind of secrecy justified keeping the president (President Clinton was not privy to Area 51 affairs) out of the loop is problematic and certainly undemocratic.

The UFO conspiracy theories emanating from Area 51 she attributes to some seriously awful human research being done there during the early cold war and the whole UFO nonsense became useful for the Air Force as a cover for its own nefarious activities. Who needs nasty aliens when we have the Air Force?

Area 51 was where the U-2 was developed. Richard Bissell (of later Bay of Pigs fame) was put in charge and everything was so secret and control of the money providing so much power that Curtis LeMay, the Air Force general and SAC commander, was royally pissed off and he was not someone to mess with. Eisenhower insisted that the pilot be CIA so as to avoid charges of military complicity should one of the pilots ever be captured. The last thing he wanted was to risk charges of hostile action. Yet hundreds of Air Force personnel were assigned to the program (by Bissell) since they had all the expertise. Eisenhower, when pushed by LeMay, insisted it remain under CIA control so he could have plausible deniability.

Secrecy could cause problems. Since they wanted no one to drive to Area 51 or live in Las Vegas, the closest town, a shuttle between Burbank and the area was initiated and workers lived in Burbank. No flight plan was listed nor any record of the flights kept. So when, inevitably, the C-54 became lost in a snowstorm, and asks for help finding their position, controllers were completely flummoxed; they had no record of any plane being in that area. The plane crashed on the top of Mount Charleston north of Las Vegas killing some all on board. Several interesting side-effects resulted from the crash. It was the first time the U-2 was used on a mission (to help pinpoint the exact location so they could retrieve briefcases and classified documents), and the CIA learned how easy it was to use the public's preconceptions and the media's desire for a story - any story -- to manipulate publicity. The press, denied access to the site, made up a story that those killed on board were working on a secret nuclear weapons program, hence all the security.

It's no wonder UFO sightings proliferated. The U-2 was originally silver in color, had an extraordinary wing span, and flew at 70,000 feet during a time when commercial aircraft flew between 10,000 and 20,000 feet. The sun glinting off the plane made it look like some kind of fiery cross. You have to remember this was a time of great paranoia. Americans were terrified of nuclear holocaust and a Russian induced Armageddon. I remember being on my uncle's farm in Wisconsin in the late fifties scanning the sky every time we heard a plane, jotting down the characteristics and its direction of flight, so the information (my uncle volunteered with the Civil Air Patrol) could be phoned in and checked to make sure it wasn't some Russian bomber. (Even then we thought it odd that a Russian bomber would make it all the way to Wisconsin without dropping any bombs, but logic never plays much of a role in paranoia.)

Politics, money and the media all symbiotically created the perfect storm of paranoia in the fifties. Time Magazine was terrifying readers with stories of Soviet ICBMs crashing down on American cities; Curtis LeMay was locked in a battle with the Defense Department over whether manned bombers were better than ICBMs (they could be recalled, missiles could not while he called for a pre-emptive strike on Russia and even ordered massive test launches of B-47s\*\* from Alaska and Greenland taking them just to Russian airspace risking a Russian missile launch.) He disdained the overflight research being done at Area 51 but continued to lose officers to both that program and the missile initiative promoted by the Paperclip scientists imported from Germany.

Those wanting a specific focus on Area 51 will be disappointed as Jacobsen uses it more for a springboard to discuss the history and background of such things as the U-2 flights, etc. Personally, I loved those details and once again was amazed that we survived the twenty years after WW II without descending into WW III. Our arrogance and self-righteous behavior was on display over and over. Can you imagine the Congressional reaction had the Soviets flown a U-2-like plane over the U.S.?

One interesting, if scary, tidbit is that the physical experiments for the U-2 pilots were designed by Paperclip doctors, i.e., German doctors who had conducted experiments on concentration camp victims. Many of those tests bugged the imagination.

Project 57 involved another kind of test. Assuming that someday an Air Force plane would crash in the United States carrying a nuclear bomb, the scientists wanted to see what would happen. (Today we would call that a dirty bomb.) The only area that could guarantee secrecy, was outside the area normally allocated for open air nuclear testing, and wouldn't be used for 25,000 years (the half-life of plutonium) was in Area 51.

The book abounds with scientists, who, had they conducted the experiments they did for the other side, would have been labeled evil. James Killian, for example. Former president of MIT, Kennedy asked him to be head of a super-secret internal agency that was hidden even from Congress. Killian authorized two extremely dangerous atmospheric 3.2 megaton hydrogen bomb tests, one at a height of 140,000 feet, over the Pacific, i.e. in the midst of the ozone layer. In order to see what the effects would be on eyesight, hundreds of monkeys were flown, their heads locked into a position where they would have to look at the explosion. Their retinas were burned, blinding them painfully. The effect on the ozone layer wasn't recorded (although I suspect it was far more deleterious than aerosol chloroflourocarbons) and damage was observed 250 miles away.

I could go on. Let's just say Jacobsen uses Area 51 discuss a wide range of topics and people related to work done at Area 51. to I won't spoil anything by discussing the flying disc that crashed in 1947, but will whet your curiosity only by suggesting you research the Horton Brothers and Operation Paperclip. Or, you could read the book. It's a depressing page-turner. I won't ever believe again anything coming out of Washington or the media. I've always said that if you really want to find out what happened, forget the daily news and wait a decade for the book, or, in this case wait fifty years for some things to be declassified..

\*\*LeMay sent some flights over Russia to test their radar defense. Some of these were shot down and those pilots who survived spent the rest of their lives in the Gulag. When asked about the provocative nature of the flights, he replied, "With a little more luck we could have started WW III." The CIA was not happy and reported his clandestine activities to Eisenhower in 1956. LeMay's actions, ironically, provided an extra boost to the push for the U-2 as the CIA argued it could provide necessary intelligence about Russian capabilities at far less risk. Still Eisenhower worried that one might be shot down triggering a nuclear holocaust. Bissell assured the president that could not happen. Well, we all remember Gary Powers. The CIA, as I note from recent headlines, has a long history of continuing to lie to the president (and probably itself.)

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## Evan says

### SPOILER ALERT!

Annie Jacobsen concludes this ambitious and mostly very good alternative history epic with a bizarre misinterpretation of Occam's razor that has plenty of readers, UFO buffs and others up in arms, but even so, I don't believe this preposterous final chapter invalidates the good, valuable and fascinating overview of the most secret "black project" weapons research conducted by the United States in the Nevada desert during the Cold War, the Vietnam War and the War on Terror.

The *\*real\** story of Area 51 -- tales of the development of stealth fighter and bomber technology, the U-2 spy plane and its variant versions, the refinement of radar, the evolution of spy and fighter drones, the creation of the X-15 rocket plane, the race to achieve mach-speed aircraft, the reverse engineering of captured Soviet MiG fighters, the testing of nuclear weapons, and so forth -- is much more interesting than the competing conspiracy theories about alien craft and extraterrestrial beings supposedly captured at Roswell, New Mexico, and carted to the top-secret Nevada base. Still, even *\*that\** urban legend is actually more plausible than the bizarre tale Jacobsen trots out, in which (bear with me here), she posits, Josef Stalin made a deal

with Nazi engineers to develop UFOs to overfly America's nuclear tech R&D sites and further used hybrid tiny humans engineered by Nazi mad scientist Josef Mengele to pilot them. Yes, folks, Jacobsen says \*that\* is the main reason Area 51 is to this day denied to exist by the U.S. government, and not all the other super-secret and plausible black-ops programs that have taken place there.

That strange tale, told only by one sketchy eyewitness, is then claimed to be a perfect example of Occam's razor in action, since it rationally explains the origins of the flying disc that allegedly crashed in Roswell in 1947. Really? Methinks the story is just another case of zebras over horses.

In any case, it's a great shame that this anticlimactic attempt by the author to tie-up loose ends introduced at the beginning of her otherwise well-researched book, has tainted the good stuff in the book's other 90 percent. Area 51 has become known primarily as an "alien" base, and not addressing that issue is certainly not an option when discussing Area 51, but Jacobsen's initial level-headedness in doing so in context gives way to yet another incredible conspiracy. Maybe attributing wacky conspiracies to Area 51 is unavoidable, like some kind of mania.

Despite this, the book actually offers a fulsome alternative history of the United States not taught in schools and provides much food for thought about the origins and evolution of the "need-to-know" national security state (which we are now grappling with in the wake of the recent NSA domestic spying revelations), in which super-secretive government and corporate elites are able to hide projects funded by us taxpayers both from us and even from presidents. When President Clinton, for instance, tried to get information on nuclear medical experiments performed on military personnel, the mentally disabled and other civilians, he hit stone walls and was basically told that he "didn't have a need to know."

The book does a good job of describing how secret projects are compartmentalized (a legacy of the Manhattan Project) so no one person knows their totality, but it also raises concerns about the problems of responsibility and accountability that arise therein, and the constant turf battles between the Air Force, the CIA, and the Atomic Energy Commission over the control of Area 51 and its black projects are continually offered by Jacobsen as examples of this dangerous game. Stories of the "dirty bomb" experiments in the desert, the nuking of the ozone layer in the late 1950s, the failure to inform the public of nuclear satellites falling from the sky, and General Curtis LeMay's rogue overflights of fighter planes into the Soviet Union without presidential approval are just some of the outrageous and infuriating cases, among many, of the cavalier behavior of men who are put in charge of dangerous toys and are able to fall back on righteous patriotic justifications for their testosterone follies.

The book also offers a clear and concise overview of the military industrial complex, how Lockheed and Raytheon and more mysterious companies such as EG&G worked hand in glove with America's government, in most cases having just as much or more power and influence in what went on than the government itself. In one case, a completely unnecessary and ultimately tragic demonstration of jet fighter technology was prompted solely by a corporation's need to have a pretty picture for its annual report.

Although much of the book causes one to shake one's head at the immense waste, environmental catastrophes and the sheer arrogance and paranoia of our leaders, it also does honor to the servicemen who risked their lives to test the world's most advanced aerial fighters. The interviews with the engineers and pilots who worked at Area 51 are among the strong suits of this book.

Although the book is uneven, and even becomes a bit dullish about a quarter of the way in, it recovers until its ludicrous conclusion. In any case, being an astute reader means knowing when to be skeptical and when to ponder the credible, and the weaker parts of the book are no reason to throw the baby out with the bath water. If you really want to know what your government has been up to, I would highly recommend this book.

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Addendum: Check out this very cool but very disturbing animation of the 2,053 known nuclear explosions on planet Earth that occurred from 1945 to 1998. It makes you wonder how we've managed to survive exposure to this much radiation.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=856fWE...>

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## Djll says

I was just listening to Terry Gross interview Jacobsen on Fresh Air, and what I heard has really blown my mind, and I don't use that term, ever. I am definitely going to get a hold of this book asap.

Jacobsen's final chapter of the book apparently concerns the 1947 Roswell alien-landing conspiracy theories. Being very secretive but convinced of her source's veracity, she said the crash was of a Soviet flying disc aircraft, inspired by or possibly directly designed by some German engineers, those zany "Horton brothers." (*Horton Hears A V-2?*) The inhabitants of the ill-fated craft? Well, here comes the really icky part: surgically (or genetically) altered *children*, inspired by the experiments of another German scientist, the infamous Josef Mengele. Altered to *look like aliens*. Apparently US brass got wind of a similar program the Soviets were carrying out, and decided it was too good to not copy. B-but we're the good guys! you say in disbelief. Well, who knows, but Jacobsen stands by her story, and she's said to have documented the rest of the book to exhaustive lengths.

What is mind-blowing is how some of the central plot points of the above story line up with certain key details in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Evil, mad Nazis who launch children inside top-secret, futuristic aircraft? Pynchon just made that bizzare shit up, and now we find out something very much like it actually happened, right here in the good old US of A? Not to mention the overall themes of paranoia and media-duped masses, drug experiments, corporations that know no law but their own, etc, etc. Just remember that it's documented that TP had access to aerospace engineers in the 1950s and 60s...

Take it from there, conspiracy kiddies...

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