

[Provided by the author]

An interview with  
Phil Patton  
author of  
DREAMLAND  
Travels inside the Secret World of Roswell and Area 51

Does Area 51 really exist?

Yes. It is in Nevada and was first used in the mid-50s to test the U-2 spy plane. Area 51 has been known by a series of names since then: Watertown, Paradise Ranch, Groom Lake, and Dreamland, the call name of the control tower at the air base. It lies right between the Nevada nuclear test site and the fighter base at Nellis. Its where the stealth fighter was tested.

What is DREAMLAND about?

DREAMLAND is about the most secret place in America, where strange bat- and manta-shaped aircraft have flown and been taken for flying saucers. My argument is that most of the flying saucer sightings have been of secret planes many of the sightings can be explained as those of U-2s or secret UAVs, unmanned aerial vehicles. And since the government wanted to keep those planes secret, it did not discourage, and may have actively encouraged, the UFO buffs.

But DREAMLAND is also about the people who are fascinated with Area 51. People like Norio Hayakawa, the Japanese-American funeral home director and country-and-western musician, who believes that the flying saucers are a front by the New World Order; Kathleen Ford, who takes pictures of mysterious blobby entities along the perimeter; Joe Bacco, who worked at the nuclear test site and paved the road to Area 51; test pilot Bob Gilliland, who flew the CIA Blackbird spy plane from the dry lake inside Dreamland; Glen Campbell, a.k.a. Psychosp, the self-appointed watchdog who created the Area 51 research center; and Paul McGinniss, who traced the funding of projects at Dreamland through the so-called black budget.

How did you get interested in DREAMLAND?

I became fascinated by the planes produced by the Lockheed Skunkworks, the U-2 I grew up hearing about. I remember the day President Johnson announced the SR71 Blackbird on television. I don't think I would have become so obsessed had I not grown up on a strategic air command base in the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War. I learned that Dreamland was a kind of monument of the Cold War. But once I got there, I became interested in all of the other people who were fascinated, even obsessed. Its a place that seems to breed obsessions of all sorts. All kinds of people see all kinds of things in it. Its a Mecca for UFO buffs. Its the subject of scrutiny by those fighting what they see as excessive government secrecy. These are fascinating people. So I spent a lot of time watching the watchers. Many of the people I talked to were fringe characters. But it's the people on the fringe who do the wild dreaming for the rest of us. They resemble the fringe thoughts that one has in one's own dreams. I

tried to take them on their own terms. I tried to move beyond the clichés to the way the folklore and pop culture of Area 51 reflected the real technology and the wider culture of the Cold War, its alienation, fear, and hope.

Could there really be flying saucers hidden there? The point is, if there were, it would be entirely possible for the government to keep us from knowing. With such high levels of secrecy, we can never know for sure.

How can you tell what is true with so many different stories being told? That's what made it interesting that one place could be the focus of so many different perspectives and cultures. Looking at Area 51 was an opportunity to see a new kind of folklore taking shape. I found that I had to move away from the place to understand it. It's part of a wider culture and I drove thousands of miles and talked to hundreds of people. So the book is sort of a quest in reverse: it begins with a view of Area 51 and finds that you have to go to all kinds of distant places, not to mention distant eras of history, to understand it.

What is really flying there? What have people been seeing? My guess is that people have been seeing stealth planes, stolen MiGs, cruise missiles, helicopters, airliners, flares, reflections. And quite likely, a new generation of UAVs--unmanned aerial vehicles, robot planes shaped like triangles and bats, like ones later made public, and maybe saucers. Some of the governments designs have worked, and we will learn about these in a few years, and some haven't. We may never learn about some of the failures.

How did you learn about DREAMLAND? I was surprised by how much I was able to find out. I talked to everyone from Cold Warriors who designed spy planes in the Fifties to Code Warriors, Silicon Valley programmers who became fascinated with secret budgets in the Nineties. They hid Area 51 inside the software of the Apple Newton, for instance, and imagined it as a video game. I talked to test pilots and generals and intelligence agency employees, to UFO buffs and conspiracy theorists. Information seeps out after years. More will undoubtedly come out in the next few decades.

## Quotes on Previous Books

Made in USA: The Secret Histories of The Things That Made America

A Selection of the Book of the Month Club

"A wondrous and witty journey back through time to uncover the histories, the little-known technologies, and the marvelous folklore that has become attached to classic American objects." -The San Diego Tribune

"Has the sharp clarity and purpose that rise only from the best kind of serious study and reflection."

-American Heritage

"Absolutely fascinating ... makes one realize just how well we've done things in the past and how well we can do them in the future ... a joy to read."

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Barron's "Like John McPhee and Tracy Kidder...Patton has an extraordinary ability to breathe life into the mundane and inanimate."

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