

# **TRUTH INSURRECTED**

The Saint Mary Project

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*“Magna est veritas et praevalabit”*

*“A time for truth against the lies...a time  
for faith, a time for science...”*

*—Paul Van Dyk, “Time of Our Lives”*

# ONE

## Uncorrelated Observation

The star-filled sky over the northeast heights of Tucson, Arizona, stirred up both fond memories and awful pain within William Harrison. Viewing the *infinite horizons* above also provoked his sense of insignificance and rising uselessness.

As he sat inside his parked black Dodge Charger, he sighed, and looked through a pair of night-vision binoculars at a house down the street. The couple inside the house had drawn the curtains and turned out the lights an hour ago. This was the third illicit liaison Harrison had observed between this particular man and woman. Although both were married, neither one of their spouses were anywhere near this place.

Harrison had already gathered plenty of photographic evidence of their affair and looked forward to closing this case very soon. The husband, who had contracted him to investigate the rumored relationship, would be devastated for sure, but at least he would know the truth. Harrison could then move on to another case, *another boring case*. Life as a private investigator paid the bills, but offered little other reward.

After lowering the driver-side window and opening the sunroof, Harrison lit up a cigarette. The smoke floated skyward, carrying Harrison's gaze with it. As the smoke dissipated above him, he caught a glimpse of something out of the ordinary.

Out of confusion, and to clear his eyes of smoke, he blinked several times. More focused now, he saw the object again. His eyes had not played tricks on him. A radiant sphere high overhead darted back and forth, and then halted its erratic movement in a single abrupt stop. These maneuvers repeated several times. Harrison sat mesmerized, mouth agape, having never observed anything like this before.

The dangling cigarette in his hand scorched his middle finger. He cursed under his breath, and then dropped the cigarette onto the center console. It rolled off and lodged beyond his reach next to the leather seat.

“Damn it,” Harrison said, pushing the door open. He exited the car and stood up, feeling his right thigh twinge with pain. The old injury still ached. After struggling to recover the smoldering cigarette between the seat and console, he tossed it onto the street and squished it under his boot.

Without hesitation, Harrison searched the sky for the object again. He found it right where he had observed it before, zigzagging back and forth. The sphere stopped for a few seconds, and then it flew in a straight line toward the northwest at an incalculable speed. The horizon consumed the object and it disappeared into the darkness.

While still standing in the street, Harrison tried to grasp what he had just witnessed. He searched for reasonable explanations, but they evaded him. None of them made sense.

After a few moments, headlights and a honking horn jerked his attention back to his terrestrial surroundings. When he stepped aside to allow the car to pass, embarrassment engulfed him. The vehicle’s occupants were the adulterous couple from the house down the street.



Eighty miles or so north of Las Vegas, Nevada, endless sagebrush, stilled by daytime heat, rustled from the nocturnal movement of small creatures gathering, hunting, and exploring. Under a darkened sky, such rituals resumed as usual. Stealth, difficult in the revealing rays

of a loitering sun, surrounded the area’s inhabitants after the light faded, succumbing to Earth’s ancient rhythms.

They moved, walking, crawling, slithering, hopping, flying, running. They mingled, roaming together among the endless acres of brush and sand. Occasionally, flash floods or tremors from live fire exercise at Yucca Flats disturbed these efforts. On July 7, however, the weather was clear, and the tremors did not come from underground. They rattled across the desert plain, scattering most critters to the safety of their dens.

Headlights cut through the heavy shroud, beams scanning erratically as the vehicles hobbled over rocky trails. Thick tires tore at the ground and sent plumes of gravel and dust through the air. Each truck appeared similar to a Chevrolet Suburban, but with an extra set of rear wheels and an extended roof. The vehicles sported dark-tinted windows, and their navy-blue exterior lacked markings or trim of any kind. A single dish antenna, about thirty inches in diameter, stood above the center of each cab.

One driver swerved his vehicle around a boulder that he spotted almost too late. He swore to himself, recovered, and then rejoined the formation of four other trucks just ahead of him. Preoccupied with the maneuver, he unknowingly steered into the path of an escaping jackrabbit. Confused, the animal froze in the sudden wash of light from the headlamps. Nothing in its experience or nature helped it to understand this bizarre intrusion into its environment. The light raced overhead and the rabbit vanished, trampled between the spinning heat of the tire tread and the coarse ground.

The caravan pressed onward, advancing with deliberate haste over familiar terrain. Then, as they approached their destination, a series of small hills and outcroppings, the tight formation slowed and methodically scattered. The lead vehicle stopped at the base of the first hill, and the others continued up the sandy slope. One parked at the crest, while the remaining trucks headed for positions on and around the adjoining hills. In unison, the headlights dimmed into darkness. Now motionless, the vehicles disappeared into the desert landscape.

Nearby, a restless coyote yelped at a million stars arched overhead in the black, cloudless sky, then trotted away to hunt mice. The distant glow of Las Vegas, some eighty miles to the southeast, appeared to be the only evidence of man.

Three men occupied the truck at the top of the first hill. One sat in the driver's seat, and the other two sat next to each other in front of a console full of monitors and humming electronic equipment. They were military, but their black jumpsuits bore no service insignia or ranks.

The driver, Airman Bresch, reached into a duffel bag and removed a pair of night-vision binoculars. From his vantage point, he possessed an unobstructed view to the south for twenty miles. He raised the binoculars and peered across the vacant stretch of desert. Seeing nothing unusual, he lowered the glasses and set them on the seat. A green digital display from the two-way radio in the dashboard illuminated the cab. In the thin light, he glanced at the M-16 rifle mounted next to the glove box.

*Lethal force authorized*, Bresch thought.

Bresch lifted the radio's microphone, paused for the end of another unit's broadcast, and said, "Tango Charlie twelve, status is Oscar." He set the microphone on the dashboard and settled back. *This will be interesting*, he thought. His right hand found the binoculars again. Slowly, methodically, he proceeded to do his job, surveying the sage and scrub brush for intruders.

In the passenger compartment behind the driver, two air traffic controllers worked over a panel of screens and indicator lights. Both perused the planned flight profile for the experimental aircraft under test tonight. They wore headsets, although only one of them responded to the radio traffic. "Confirm one target signal, quadrant zero, altitude zero. Standing by for resumption of countdown." They stopped their various movements and waited for the response.

"All stations, central control is go for countdown resumption at 2230 hours. This is not a scrub; we are in alpha hold only. Twelve minutes, mark, to countdown with T-minus eight and twenty. Commercial traffic is minimal. Restricted space is clear."

Hearing this, the two technicians removed their headsets. One of them, an air force lieutenant, clicked a brown knob to "cabin audio." He looked at his partner and said, "Sergeant Gonzales, when we acquire the target, keep a close eye on its downrange altitude. I'll monitor flight path deviation."

"Yes, sir."

"After reaching operational altitude, the experimental is not to fall below five thousand feet. Remember, its signal will be intermittent at times, so call out your figures early."

"Yes, sir," Sergeant Gonzales said.

The lieutenant read a checklist mounted on a panel above his position in the vehicle. Next to the panel, a six-inch computer screen displayed meteorological data transmitted from Nellis Air Force Base.

After several quiet minutes, Gonzales broke the silence. "Excuse me, Lieutenant? Sir, at the briefing earlier tonight, Colonel Stone said this would be our last field operation with the experimental."

The lieutenant nodded.

"So, I was wondering, will our unit help with the flight testing of the prototypes?"

Holding his breath, he hoped his question was not out of line. Discipline, his superiors informed him, represented the cornerstone of his unit's success. Sergeant Eric Filipe Gonzales had journeyed a long way from the barrios of East Los Angeles, and preferred not to compromise his standing in the air force, but there were some personal matters that bothered him.

"Our performance is excellent so far, but orders haven't been issued yet for the next cycle." The lieutenant ran a thumbnail along the underside of his narrowly trimmed mustache. His tone eased, sounding more conversational than official. "Frankly, I'd like to be rotated out, maybe to Wright-Pat, or even Edwards. This place is turning into a circus. We're eighty miles from Vegas, in the middle of the fucking desert, and people keep broadcasting their television shows on our front porch. It's getting to where even my dog knows what Area 51 is. I'm surprised the operations continue."

Unaccustomed to speaking so plainly, the lieutenant immediately wished to replace his comments with silence. His back stiffened, and he apologized to the sergeant for sounding overwrought. "I shouldn't let myself get so worked up; Colonel Stone's a good commander. He'll make sure things work out." He flicked his mustache again while finally answering the sergeant's question: "They tell me the prototypes won't be tested again until December. Scuttlebutt says it's due to power plant, or power cell, problems, something like that. Been an ongoing problem for years. Anyway, we'll probably have routine traffic-control assignments until then. My guess is they're concerned about curiosity seekers. Why do you ask?"

"My wife and I just had a baby, sir. Our first."

"Uh-huh."

"She doesn't say it, sir, but I know she'd like me to have a regular schedule. These late nights aren't too convenient."

"I see."

"Fortunately, Megan is very patient."

The lieutenant inspected the meteorological display. Light winds drifting across the test area were subsiding. "Good."

"Sometimes I wish I could talk to her about what I do, but when I think about it, it's not always that clear to me what work I'm involved in."

"I wonder myself sometimes. It's best that we don't know."

"Yes, sir. The military has its reasons."

"On that, Sergeant, there is no question."



Eighty miles away, cars and people packed the Las Vegas strip. The warm summer nights and allure of quick cash always invited untold numbers into the city to trade workaday customs for a roll of the dice, a draw of the cards, or the drop of a coin.

This night was no different from any other. Gamblers lost big. But the sound of jackpots, music, laughter, and the haphazard

choreography of wheels, lights, and thousands of people overcame any hint of defeat.

Downtown, at the corner of Fremont and Clark, a motorcycle cop, Nick Ridley, watched some of those people walk and drive past him. For a Saturday night, the calls were unusually light, so he parked in a highly visible location to deter potential violators.

Ridley found the job interesting enough, and had earned a reputation as a reliable, if intellectual, cop. One of the few patrol officers who held a master's degree in psychology, Ridley understood how to talk to people, and by doing so, controlled situations better. To some of his law enforcement colleagues, he stood out as the "shrink" whose streetwise therapy sessions made him useful at times. Already a senior patrol officer, most assumed Ridley would earn his sergeant's stripes within one or two years more.

At the moment, he checked his watch. Ten forty-five. His shift ended at eleven, and his much-needed two-week Lake Havasu vacation started immediately afterward. Ridley turned on the motorcycle's ignition and drove to the station for debriefing. With no radio traffic, he proceeded to broadcast his status. "Mary-two-three."

"Mary-two-thr—"

Something interrupted the response.

Ridley waited for the dispatcher to continue, but nothing happened. "Mary-two-three," he said again.

This time, a burst of static and rapid clicking replied.

*Weird*, Ridley thought.

The interference ended after several seconds, followed by the dispatcher's voice. "Three, clear to transmit."

"Mary-two-three, ten-nineteen to yours."

"Ten-four."

Ridley made a note to report the motorcycle's radio malfunction to the watch commander. He proceeded along Clark Street and drove the eight blocks to the station. Similar to hundreds of times in the last three years, he entered the underground parking structure and cruised into one of the spaces reserved for patrol vehicles.

Removing his helmet, he heard familiar voices echoing around the gray cinder-block structure. He could not hear exactly what the other officers discussed, but something felt out of place. Instead of hearing the usual radio traffic from the dispatch speakers mounted along the walls of the parking structure, he heard no traffic at all. Although it was a slow night, during shift change, units regularly called in their on- or off-duty status.

But now, something else penetrated the air. The quiet speakers broadcasted clicking, rapid clicking, like earlier, except fainter, more distant.

Ridley approached the other officers and noticed that Lieutenant Walter Maxwell, the watch commander, stood with them. After flashing a cheerful, “I’m okay, you’re okay” smile, Ridley said, “Lieutenant, I’d like to report a radio malfunction.”

“Well, if you’re reporting officially, then I’ll need you to fill out the appropriate forms, in triplicate,” Maxwell said, but without the typical firmness of his baritone voice.

“In that case, the report should come from someone with actual technical qualifications. I’m more of a people person.”

Further radio interference produced a grimace on the watch commander’s face. He rubbed his sun-scorched forehead. The motion caused flakes of dandruff to precipitate out of his stiff, black flattop, a hairstyle he had worn for thirty years or more, beginning with his service as a special agent with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. The flakes landed on his wide shoulders and ever-thickening midriff. Some of it even fell the entire six feet, four inches from scalp to greasy cement floor. “Never heard anything like this before. The interference is on every channel, so we know it’s not a cued microphone.”

One of the officers tried a radio check, but dispatch still provided no response. Just rapid clicking interference permeated the parking structure.

Lieutenant Maxwell shrugged and yawned. “Well, it must be a system problem. They’ll have to coordina—” A sharp jolt of static silenced his comments.

Ridley and the others winced at the harsh sound as it ricocheted throughout the parking structure. After several seconds, the static and clicking tapered off. A string of on-duty status reports came over the air in rapid succession. As the transmissions continued, the officers in the parking structure dispersed. Some entered the station, while others went to their waiting patrol vehicles, already forgetting about the odd interference. Ridley followed Lieutenant Maxwell to the building’s entrance and held open the door.

“What do you think the problem was?” Ridley said.

“Don’t know. Like you, I’m no technician. No biggie, though—seems to be working fine now.”

“I thought it might have been my unit’s radio, but since it’s not, can I go ahead and take off now? I’m anxious to start my vacation.”

“Just make sure your reports are done.”

“They are. Dropped them off earlier.”

“See you when you get back, then. Have a good one.”

With that, Ridley stepped inside the police station and headed for the locker room.

*What a slow night*, he thought.



Inside the oversized navy-blue Chevrolet Suburban parked amidst the desert scrub, the controllers no longer engaged in idle conversation, but rather focused on their main display screens. Another ten-minute delay in the countdown had left them ample time to review the planned flight profile for the experimental aircraft and to triple-check their various electronic systems. The sergeant and lieutenant waited with practiced patience for resumption of the countdown, which held at T-minus forty-seven seconds.

On the radar panel in front of the sergeant, a flat, twenty-inch screen displayed white and blue lines crisscrossing a dark gray background. The white lines formed the perimeters of the test ranges adjacent to Nellis Air Force Base. The blue lines, which resembled the shape of an inverted pyramid with a narrow rectangle protruding

from the bottom point, delineated the airspace assigned for this particular test of a flying saucer recovered in 1947. The craft, otherwise known as the “experimental,” originated from beyond Earth. Its collision with another similar vehicle and their subsequent crashes in the desert near Roswell, New Mexico, had provided the US government decades’ worth of reverse engineering and sporadic flight tests.

Words and numbers on the screen also denoted various mountain peaks and their elevations: “SHEEP PK/9750,” “CHARLESTON PK/11918,” and “MUDDY PK/5363.” At the bottom of the screen, near the center, was, “LAS VEGAS/MCCARRAN.” A similar screen on display in front of the lieutenant also included several dashed yellow lines within the borders of the assigned airspace. These marks indicated the planned flight path for the experimental, represented by a white dot on both screens and labeled as “XP/0.” Radar data had the experimental positioned near the upper left corner of both screens. The dot flickered at irregular intervals, something the controllers had noticed during other tests and had been told would occur again.

As he watched the dot, the lieutenant lifted his headset back to his ears and nodded to the sergeant to do the same. He turned off the cabin audio switch and folded his arms. For a split second, he thought he heard his headset crackle with static, so he double-checked that its connector remained attached in the console jack. The interruption cleared, and both listened as the countdown resumed.

“T-minus forty-seven and counting. Med reports normal life signs. Thirty seconds, mark. Telemetry reports online. All systems normal—”

More static hissed through the controllers’ headsets. The lieutenant tapped the earpiece with his index finger. He glanced at the sergeant and saw his subordinate’s face change from a look of bored professionalism to utter confusion.

Sergeant Gonzales jerked forward. What he saw made no sense. Another white dot appeared near the “MUDDY PK” marker and moved in the direction of the experimental. *Report. Report as you’ve been trained to do*, he thought. His still boyish voice squeaked out the warning. “Target! Unknown target!”

The vehicle’s onboard computer assigned the unknown target a designation, “UNK/7803.” The dot tracked steadily, with its altitude indicator showing a rapid descent.

The lieutenant scanned the display. “What the hell?”

This time, the static blasted through the headphones at high volume, and both men instinctively ripped them off.

Anxious to call in his report, the lieutenant carefully raised the headphones to his ears. The static dissipated, but a strange clicking now emanated from the earpiece. With no radio transmissions, he attempted to broadcast an update. “Uncorrelated observation inbound at angels seven, rapid descent, entering quadrant four.” He checked the screen. The experimental remained on the ground. “Can you hear anything, Sergeant?”

Preoccupied with the image on the display, the sergeant did not answer. The unknown target just performed an instantaneous ninety-degree turn and dropped to below two thousand feet.

“It’s coming this way,” Sergeant Gonzales said.

The lieutenant, despite the technical problem with the radio, kept sending the status reports. “Unknown now on course three-one-zero at sixteen hundred feet. Variable airspeed.” He turned to Gonzales and said, “Get with the driver and do a visual check.”

“Yes, sir.” Gonzales stepped out of his seat and slid open the driver cab’s access window. The driver leaned toward the radio console, checking different channels. “No time for that, Bresch; the radio’s down. Get your binoculars and get out.”

After grabbing his night-vision binoculars, Airman Bresch lifted the rifle from its dashboard mount and joined Sergeant Gonzales at the front of the vehicle.

“There’s an unknown target, southeast, about five miles,” Gonzales said.

Bresch searched the desert terrain for intruders.

“No,” Gonzales said, pointing at the sky, “an unknown, *airborne* target.”

“What altitude?”

“Under two thousand.”

“Civilian or military?”

“Unknown!”

Gonzales’s eyes darted back and forth, trying to find the object. He knew there must be a reasonable explanation for this situation. The briefing was clear enough: one flight, one target. *Must be a technical glitch*, he thought.

“There it is,” Bresch said, confused. “It’s low. I thought the experimental was restricted to five thousand or above?”

Looking toward the horizon, Sergeant Gonzales spotted a glowing ball of light. Alternating between glossy shades of green and blue, it moved steadily to the northwest.

Silently.

The luminous orb, orange now, instantaneously jumped skyward several hundred feet, and then danced ahead.

It stopped.

Red and silver strands, a flickering halo of plasma, encircled the sphere.

The rapid clicking now emanated, but not from the radio; it echoed through their heads. A chill shivered up Gonzales’s spine, causing him to arch his shoulders and shake his head.

The unknown target hovered, emitting a radiant glow and obscuring the stars behind it.

With eyes fixed on the object, Airman Bresch stepped backward until the truck’s bumper pressed against his trembling legs. “What’s that clicking sound?” The binoculars dropped to the ground, and then so did he, onto his knees.

Out of the darkness, the air vibrated with another, more familiar noise. Sergeant Gonzales turned around and found a relieved expression on Bresch’s face.

“Here they come!” Bresch said.

Two F-15 fighters raced in from the north. As dual intakes greedily consumed huge droughts of air, the hot turbofans propelled the planes toward the unknown. They approached, encountering their target in a matter of seconds.

It waited for them.

The fighters rushed in aggressively, closing the gap.

The object maneuvered, jumping again, two thousand feet straight up.

One of the F-15s fired its afterburners and accelerated into a steep climb. The second jet rolled through a right turn, heading west. It circled low, near the truck’s location, and then ascended directly toward the target. The other F-15 also reversed direction, running parallel to the craft and slightly above it.

The fighters engaged.

A plume of white luminescence spiraled outward from the intruder, blanketing the hilltop in a brilliant flash, and then it collapsed as quickly as it had appeared.

And the fighters vanished.

Before Sergeant Gonzales comprehended what happened, the object disappeared in a white streak toward the northwest. “My God!”

“Where are they?” Bresch said.

Gonzales grabbed the binoculars from the ground and scanned the sky and terrain. “I don’t see them.”

“They can’t just be gone. They must have crashed.”

Gonzales ran back to the truck and spoke to the lieutenant. “Sir, we need search and rescue out here right away.”

The lieutenant provided no response. His headphones lay on the console, and he held a cell phone next to his ear. He did not speak, except to say, “Yes, sir.” After hanging up the phone, he said, “Sergeant, the test was scrubbed due to a communications malfunction. All other systems are normal. We’re returning to base.”

“But, sir—”

“The site is secure and all systems are normal! We are returning to base.”