

**INSIDE
THE PENTAGON'S
HUNT FOR UFOs**

IMMINENT



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Inside the Pentagon's Hunt for UFOs

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The logo for William Morrow, featuring a stylized, cursive script of the letters 'wm'.

WILLIAM MORROW

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the two most important groups of people in my life. First and foremost, to my loving wife, Jennifer, and daughters, Taylor and Alexandria. Never was there a person so blessed as me to have the tremendous love and support I receive from you. No matter what may happen to me, you have given me everything anyone could ever ask for, and so much more.

And second, to all those who remain in the shadows. Whether you had a UAP encounter or are aware of facts that you feel should be known by all, know that you have a voice. When governments lie to their people, all of democracy is at risk. Keep the faith, we hear you.

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Foreword

May 16, 2024

There is a debate among historians regarding something they call the “Great Man” theory of history. According to this perspective, history can largely be explained by the impact of courageous and inspired individuals who challenge the status quo, leading to irreversible changes that forever alter the course of human affairs. I leave it to the reader to assess for themselves whether Lue Elizondo is one of those people. At a minimum, I can say without fear of contradiction that Lue has played a central and indispensable role in forever changing the way humanity views the issue of unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP). Indeed, revelations regarding the UAP issue may soon cause humanity to reframe its view of itself and our place in the cosmos. This incredible true story will, among other things, explain how the UAP issue was recently transformed from a scurrilous tabloid newspaper topic to a valid and important national security issue.

To fully appreciate the impact Lue and some of his colleagues have had on our understanding of UAP, you need to first understand the situation that existed at the time Lue began his journey. When I first met Lue at a closed-door Pentagon meeting early in 2017, the UAP issue was still regarded with unremitting contempt and disdain by the mainstream press, the scientific community, and the US government. This was nothing new: the UAP issue had been mired in a quagmire of controversy, wheels futilely spinning, accusations flying, since the 1940s. Admittedly, it didn’t help that a parade of UAP charlatans and frauds were seeking to exploit the issue for fame and money. No matter, from 1970, when the US Air Force abandoned Project Blue Book (its public relations effort to investigate and discredit UAP reports), until late in 2017, when Lue resigned his position on the staff of the secretary of defense, there was no meaningful change in either the stated position of the US government or in public perceptions of the UAP topic.

True, sensational press reports of UAP activity would occasionally surface; there were also some ineffectual efforts to engage Congress, and even a significant but short-lived congressional earmark for UAP research, but there was no meaningful progress in recognizing the validity of the UAP issue from 1970 through 2017. Indeed, the UAP stigma was still so bad in 2017 that most commercial and military personnel were afraid to report their observations for fear of damaging their careers and reputations. Similarly, most civilian witnesses were reluctant to discuss their experiences with friends or family, much less file an official UAP sighting report. Meanwhile, the handful of people at the Department of Defense (DoD) who had a serious interest in the issue were careful to conceal it from any but a few trusted friends. Prior to 2017, when DoD personnel discussed UAP it was usually behind closed doors or in whispers.

This climate of hostility toward the UAP issue was a direct result of US government policies formulated by the CIA’s Robertson Panel in 1953. Claiming to fear US air defense communications might be overwhelmed by UAP reports, this CIA panel advised the Air Force to enlist the Walt Disney Company and the mass media in a campaign to “debunk”

UAP. A subsequent Air Force–funded UAP study at the University of Colorado went further, declaring the topic devoid of scientific merit. Chaired by physicist Edward Condon, it went so far as to recommend that academic institutions ensure students could not receive academic credit for studying the UAP issue. Dr. Condon’s report provided the Air Force the excuse it sought to close Project Blue Book, its controversial UFO investigation. As time passed, Air Force contempt and hostility for the UAP issue became more explicit. By 1970, despite thousands of credible, unexplained UAP reports, the Air Force disingenuously took the position that UAP were simply the result of “a mild form of hysteria; individuals who fabricate reports to perpetrate a hoax or seek publicity; psychopathological persons, and misidentification of natural objects.” In other words, according to the US Air Force, anyone reporting a UAP was either crazy, a fraud, or a fool.

For decades thereafter, notwithstanding the testimony of many US military veterans, and documentation unearthed by UAP researchers confirming UAP intrusions into the heavily restricted airspace surrounding US nuclear weapons facilities, the Air Force continued to staunchly maintain that “[n]o UFO reported, investigated and evaluated by the US Air Force has ever given any indication of a threat to national security.” It was not enough for the Air Force to merely deny a threat; the Air Force even claimed there was no indication of technology “beyond the range of present day knowledge.” These were the formal positions of the US government in 1970, and they remained the positions of the US government in 2017, nearly a half century later, when I first met Lue. In short, we faced a prevailing establishment mindset that associated the UAP issue with irrational beliefs in subjects like poltergeists or astrology.

In 2017, at the time we met, I was an unpaid consultant for the Office of Naval Intelligence, hoping to still contribute in some way after retiring from full-time work on national security issues in the Pentagon and Congress. A mutual friend from the CIA, Jim Semivan, brought Lue to my attention. After finally overcoming the baffling and inefficient security procedures that bedevil anyone working intelligence issues for Uncle Sam, we were finally able to meet in Lue’s Pentagon office.

It was an extraordinary meeting. Lue is heavily muscled, intense, energetic, charismatic, and effusive. He sports bold, colorful tattoos on his arms and carries himself more like a wrestler than a bureaucrat. He evinces a determination and intensity more often encountered in the ranks of combat units than in the civilian bureaucracy. He was wearing a variety of security badges and IDs on a chain around his neck, each a small totem of access and power in the national security kingdom. He has a natural gift for verbal communication that quickly became apparent.

What I learned as the meeting progressed was both astonishing and outrageous. Astonishing, because Lue presented incontrovertible evidence that strange, unidentified aircraft were routinely violating sensitive US military airspace. These bizarre, silent craft lacked any discernible markings or means of propulsion. We both knew these were not experimental US aircraft, based on messages from the fleet and our own extensive contacts and access to the world of classified Special Access Programs (SAPs). Consequently, there seemed to be three primary possibilities: (1) a potential US adversary, most likely Russia or China, had achieved a major technological breakthrough that might

tip the global balance of power against America and the free world; or (2) we had visitors from an alien civilization who were keenly interested in US military capabilities; or (3) quite possibly UAP were a combination of mysterious terrestrial and nonterrestrial craft.

Given what we knew about Russian and Chinese capabilities, and the locations and nature of some of these intrusions, the ET hypothesis actually seemed the most viable explanation for some cases. This was clearly true for a series of encounters involving the *Nimitz* Carrier Strike Group in November 2004. At the time, the USS *Princeton*, an Aegisclass guided missile cruiser, escorting the mighty aircraft carrier the USS *Nimitz*, detected a large number of maneuvering objects that appeared to be descending from low earth orbit. They were dropping vertically from extreme altitudes at fantastic speeds to around 20,000 feet, hovering briefly, then instantaneously accelerating, sometimes to extreme speeds. After several days of observation, two US Navy F/A18s from the *Nimitz* managed to intercept one of these strange craft at close quarters in conditions of perfect visibility. For Navy Commander Dave Fravor, the 48-foot-long, wingless white craft he observed from the cockpit of his F/A-18 was so radical in behavior and appearance, so vastly more capable than any known aircraft, it seemed clear to this high-ranking officer and his fellow pilots that it was “. . . not from this world.” Before the day was over, this amazing, noiseless, almost egg-shaped vehicle was seen by six naval aviators, tracked by multiple radars on multiple platforms, and videotaped by an advanced military infrared targeting system. During these encounters the object did things heretofore deemed impossible for any aircraft, demonstrating unprecedented speeds and maneuverability and surviving forces that would destroy many times over any aircraft or missile made by man. To date nobody has been able to offer a credible conventional explanation for these astonishing events.

Lue not only briefed me on this case and showed me an official report; he later arranged for me to participate in official debriefings with Commander Fravor, Lieutenant Alex Dietrich, and other Navy personnel who had seen UAP up close or on military sensor systems. Any lingering doubts about the legitimacy of the UAP topic quickly evaporated. It is one thing to read about a UAP incident; it is quite another to hear about it firsthand from US military personnel whose training, integrity, and reliability make them ideal witnesses. These individuals had no incentive to report these incidents. Indeed, they had a strong incentive not to report what they saw for fear of damaging their prospects for promotion. In light of this, and their exemplary skills and patriotism, it would have been grossly irresponsible to disregard their accounts.

As Lue described these military encounters and showed me authentic military “gun camera” UAP videos, I sometimes felt as though I were having an out-of-body experience. Even though I had studied the UAP issue extensively as a private citizen, seeing this compelling official evidence at a secret Pentagon meeting was an almost surreal experience. At times I felt as though I were a character in a Hollywood sci-fi movie. I had long been intrigued by the UAP issue, but prior to this meeting UAP were an abstract concept. Now, very suddenly, the issue was becoming both concrete and profoundly concerning. At times I struggled to focus while Lue presented the UAP data he had accumulated over many years. My mind was churning, trying to recalculate and repair its

suddenly altered map of reality. Could one or more intelligent species from another solar system have found us? If so, why would aliens be so acutely and persistently interested in US military capabilities? Was it merely curiosity regarding our most advanced technologies? Was it to gauge any potential threats they might encounter while operating in earth's atmosphere? Or was something more sinister occurring? Were these devices collecting intelligence on US military forces in support of some sinister plan? What could we do to determine the capabilities of these vehicles and the intentions of whoever was operating them? How could we overcome the bureaucratic hostility that was preventing this information from reaching senior policymakers in the executive and legislative branches of government?

The more I pondered the information Lue was presenting, the more my fascination and amazement turned to outrage and anger. After all, I had spent the better part of my adult life engaged in intelligence oversight. Yet the information Lue was presenting made it clear the intelligence community was once again failing to incorporate lessons it should have learned from a number of prior tragic disasters. This was, to my mind, a blatant failure of intellectual integrity in the face of clear evidence America was at risk from a new capability being deployed by one or more unknown actors. Yet, aside from Lue and a handful of his colleagues, nobody in the government seemed to care.

As the reader may know, it is not unusual for Russian Bear bombers to occasionally fly across the Bering Strait toward Alaska, prompting US fighter aircraft on strip alert to launch and intercept them in international airspace. The moment these lumbering Russian aircraft are detected, intelligence reporting mechanisms are immediately activated to ensure that America's military and civilian leadership is promptly notified. These Bear bomber intrusions are typically also reported in the press. By contrast, off our east coast, America was suffering recurring violations of restricted US airspace, week after week, month after month, without any formal intelligence reporting or press coverage. In fact, I was shocked to learn that the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), responsible for guarding North American airspace, was not even notified of these intrusions. Whether it was Russia, China, or someone else, this was clearly unacceptable.

It quickly became clear that when it came to UAP, the mighty US intelligence apparatus was paralyzed and ineffectual. I could not help but be reminded of the fabled story of the emperor's new clothes. Only, in this instance, instead of the rank and file pretending to admire clothing that did not exist, some defense and intelligence personnel were pretending not to notice advanced aircraft that plainly did exist. In fact, encounters with these craft were becoming so commonplace, one military air base began posting warnings of the potential for mid-air collisions in an area that should have been devoid of any non-US military aircraft.

As a career intelligence professional, I was keenly aware of the tragic losses associated with past intelligence failures. On December 7, 1941, a young lieutenant operating a radar battery in Hawaii detected incoming Japanese warplanes but failed to alert his superiors, blithely assuming the incoming aircraft detected by the radar he was operating were

probably just US aircraft returning from a training mission. As we all know, disaster ensued.

On September 11, 2001, America suffered the loss of thousands of lives that might have been spared if the CIA and FBI had only been willing to share information. I was in the Pentagon when American Airlines Flight 77 struck the building, so that failure was burned into my memory. Not only were thousands of lives lost on September 11, 2001, but thousands of US military personnel later died, along with tens or hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, because this tragedy was exploited to justify an entirely unnecessary invasion of Iraq that could have been averted if the US intelligence community had correctly discerned that Saddam Hussein did not have a viable weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program.

Compounding these miserable and costly failures, the intelligence community then failed to warn policymakers that no reasonable amount of US military force could succeed in pacifying Afghanistan, much less convert it to a nation championing conventional American values and beliefs. One might have thought we'd have learned a lesson about the limits of conventional military power against insurgents in Vietnam or, failing that, have noticed what happened to the British and later the Soviet Union when they invaded Afghanistan. I vividly recall calling my beloved uncle James Mellon, who had spent considerable time hunting in remote regions of Afghanistan, the day the Soviets invaded that war-racked, tribal country. When I asked whether he thought the impoverished Afghan people stood a chance against the mighty Soviet Army, he replied immediately and without hesitation, "The Soviets will never defeat these people." This should have been evident to anyone who knew that wild and mountainous country and had studied its history. Why did we think we'd succeed where the Soviets, the British, and every other nation that tried to dominate Afghanistan had failed? The philosopher George Santayana might as well have been speaking of Uncle Sam when he penned his oft-quoted phrase, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." These disasters demonstrate a shockingly poor record of performance for the world's most generously funded intelligence community.

What I was learning from Lue was frighteningly reminiscent of these prior disasters. Once again, like Pearl Harbor, unidentified aircraft were being detected, in this case not once, but repeatedly, month after month for years, yet no warning was being passed up the chain of command. There was a total failure to disseminate this vital information to senior officials or even the North American Aerospace Defense Command.

Further, as was the case with the Al Qaeda attack of September 11, 2001, it was obvious that multiple agencies and departments had significant UAP information they were not sharing. For example, US Navy aviators were routinely encountering UAP off the east coast in designated military training areas. However, US Air Force F-22s with even more powerful sensors were using the same training areas. They had to be detecting these strange craft as well. It was clear that the Air Force pilots were either afraid to report what they were seeing or the Air Force was refusing to share their reports. Meanwhile, the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the

National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Security Agency (NSA) also appeared to have important UAP data they were not sharing. This seemed a clear echo of the problem that had proven so costly on September 11, 2001, when the intelligence community failed to prevent the deadly terrorist attack that destroyed the World Trade Center. Lue and I were both determined to do whatever we could to prevent another disastrous intelligence failure.

In addition to the evidence Lue presented regarding recurring military encounters with UAP, Lue also made me aware of an investigation into the UAP issue that had been undertaken by an aerospace contractor using \$22 million in DoD funds earmarked for UAP analysis by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in 2008. For my purposes, the most notable and useful information developed by the Advanced Aerospace Weapons System Application Program (AAWSAP) was their thorough report on the *Nimitz* case.

Unfortunately, despite being the result of a good-faith effort by the powerful Senate Majority Leader, the Honorable Harry Reid, the US Air Force and most components of the US intelligence community refused to support this congressionally funded UAP investigation. Indeed, the Defense Department worked to kill this short-lived program at its earliest opportunity. By the time we met, what remained of Senator Reid's inspired effort was a successor initiative Lue called the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP). Lue and his colleagues were doing all they could to address the issue, but he lacked a high-level advocate from within or outside the Pentagon.

For the intelligence community to function effectively, its leaders need to leverage rigorous analytical processes and be willing to speak unwelcome truths to those in power. Yet, aside from Lue's group, this was clearly not happening with regard to UAP. Nobody in the intelligence community was even reporting these incidents, much less conducting an investigation into their origin, intent, or technology. As has happened too often before, in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, it seemed far too many people were willing to quietly "go along to get along" rather than challenging the status quo.

Thankfully, Lue was willing to not only confront the system but ultimately even fall on his sword and resign in protest.

Naturally, as a veteran of the Defense Department myself, my first instinct was to work through the chain of command. It seemed a long shot but I thought I might be able to help Lue break through the suffocating DoD bureaucracy by getting him an audience with the secretary of defense. Under normal circumstances this would have been impossible, but I was friends with two highly capable and patriotic young men who worked directly with Secretary of Defense James Mattis on a near daily basis.

When that effort ultimately fell short, as you will see in the pages ahead, Lue faced a draconian choice: abandon his efforts to awaken a slumbering national security bureaucracy from within or take the extreme step of resigning in protest to draw attention to these alarming intrusions. It was a fateful decision for Lue and his family. We discussed the options and had some heartfelt conversations as Lue weighed this momentous decision. We also discussed a plan I developed to get the issue before Congress and the American people in the event Lue resigned. Thankfully, Lue was not willing to sit quietly and ignore recurring violations of US airspace by mysterious, unmarked aircraft. Once

Lue made his fateful decision to resign in protest, we immediately launched a concerted effort to get him and this critical information about UAP to Congress, the press, and the American people.

In the pages that follow, the reader will have the opportunity to follow Lue's UAP journey from the outset, many years before we first met in the Pentagon, to our fateful Pentagon and congressional meetings, then onward to the present day. It is a fascinating story, not only because of the profound and mysterious nature of UAP itself, but also because of the many colorful personalities involved; Lue's personal hardships and sacrifices; and the insights and lessons learned regarding the Defense Department and the intelligence community.

Thankfully, the truth has prevailed; DoD and the IC now acknowledge that UAP are real and the phenomenon is global. Military reports are pouring in —over one thousand since 2004 at last count. Serious investigations are underway. Even the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), once a bastion of UAP contempt, is now taking UAP seriously. This too is a direct result of our efforts, as NASA director Bill Nelson was a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee at the time we arranged for Navy aviators to brief Senate Armed Services Committee members and staff. These briefings by Navy aviators were the seminal event that legitimized the UAP issue for Congress and later NASA.

In sum, nobody can deny that in the short period of time since Lue departed the Pentagon in protest and we approached Congress and the national media, the UAP issue has been transformed. Today the topic is being covered by the mainstream press, championed by Congress, and adopted as a legitimate and important mission area by the Department of Defense, NASA, and the US intelligence community. We are hopeful that, as a result, definitive answers regarding this great mystery will finally be forthcoming.

How did this turnaround occur after so many decades, at a time the UAP issue seemed hopelessly mired in controversy and conspiracy? What does our government really know about the UAP issue? Is it true unidentified craft are operating in restricted US military airspace? If so, how concerned should we be?

Nobody is in a better position to tell the story of the recent dramatic transformation of the UAP issue than Lue Elizondo, the author of this book. After reading this account you'll be in a much better position to assess the questions above for yourself. You'll also be able to judge whether Lue is an example of the "Great Man" theory of history, namely a singular individual whose intrepid actions changed the course of history. In my view, absent Lue's persistence and courage, the US government would still be denying the existence of UAP and failing to investigate a phenomenon that may well prove to be the greatest discovery in history. I find it heartening to see that as large and complex as American society has become, individual actions can still make all the difference.

Christopher Mellon

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Former
Minority Staff Director of the Senate Intelligence Committee

Author's Note

You may be wondering why I titled the book *Imminent*. The word itself is sometimes associated with another word, *threat*. Although at first glance it may appear that this book focuses on the potential threat of unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP), or UFOs in the vernacular, that is not my intent. According to some of the common definitions of the word *imminent*, it usually means something is about to happen, or impending or inevitable. This is precisely why I chose the title. Regardless of whether one believes UAP represent a threat to our national security or, on the contrary, perhaps UAP represent a new opportunity for our species, we are at the point where the reality of UAP is now upon us.

The word *imminent* can mean many things, depending on who you ask.

Given the fact that Congress is now taking this topic seriously, one may presume that the conversation about UAP is now imminent as a national discussion. Some, in the theological communities, may view the topic as requiring imminent dialogue as a new paradigm emerges for humanity, while others may view UAP as being the beginning of a new imminent world view about our place in the universe. And for many in the UFO community, they may see this as a sign of imminent government disclosure about nonhuman intelligence.

Ultimately, I leave it up to you, the reader, to decide what *imminent* means to you. Maybe, after reading this book, you will walk away with a new meaning for yourself.

Lue Elizondo

April 2024

Introduction

In late 2008, I began a new job over at the Pentagon after several tours with other US intelligence agencies. Shortly thereafter, my life changed forever when I was recruited into a strange and highly sensitive US intelligence program unlike any I had ever been a part of. The program investigated the global mystery that is “unidentified anomalous phenomena,” or UAP for short, also known to many as UFOs. For nearly a decade, I found myself on the front lines of the biggest paradigm shift in human history and learned the reality of our place in the universe.

Unidentified craft with beyond-next-generation technology—including the ability to move in ways that defy our knowledge of physics and to do so within air, water, and space—have been operating with complete impunity all over the world since at least World War II.

These craft are not made by humans. Humanity is in fact *not* the only intelligent life in the universe, and *not* the alpha species. Yes, I know that’s going to take a bit of time to process, but buckle up. There is a lot more.

UAP, and the nonhuman intelligence controlling them, present at best a very serious national security issue, and at worst the possibility of an existential threat to humanity.

Although I had plenty of jobs that challenged me personally and professionally, this job transformed my life. It changed the way that I looked at the universe and humankind's place in it. It changed my view of how one becomes a good father, husband, and son. It also reminded me what it means to be a patriot and to truly serve your country, the obligation we in government have to always act in the best interest of the American people, regardless of the personal stakes.

Over time, my colleagues and I gained insight into *how* these mysterious UAP operate, and into the intentions of the nonhuman intelligence behind them.

While there are valid reasons for secrecy around some aspects of UAP, I do not think humanity should be kept in the dark about the fundamental fact that we are not the only intelligent life in the universe. The United States government and other major governments have decided its citizens do not have a right to know, but I could not disagree more.

You might be thinking this all sounds crazy. I'm not saying it doesn't sound crazy, I'm saying that it's real.

Chapter 1

Damned If I Do, Damned If I Don't

In my twenties, I joined the US Army and was recruited into various sensitive programs in military intelligence. Later in my career, I did three combat tours in Afghanistan and the Middle East and went on to work all over the world with America's most elite special operations and intelligence units.

As an operations officer and senior intelligence officer, I was assigned missions throughout the world, focusing on counterinsurgencies, counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and counterespionage. I ran intelligence efforts against enemies including ISIS, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, the Taliban, and the FARC. I led classified investigations worldwide with partners that included the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I worked within the Department of Defense (DoD), the Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive (ONCIX), the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Eventually, I managed Special Access Programs (SAPs) for the National Security Council (NSC) and the White House.

Finally, in 2008, I returned to a job at the Department of Defense. While in that assignment, I worked for the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence (OUSDI), focused on an information-sharing operation between the DoD, DHS, and state, local, and tribal law enforcement authorities.

The feds had recently begun helping these smaller law enforcement agencies tap into larger, more sophisticated national databases, so folks on the ground could better do their jobs, and maybe track down drug dealers, terrorists, or spies operating within the US and on tribal lands.

At the time, I had a large corner office in a building the Pentagon rented in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Arlington, Virginia. Among other things, the building housed various departments of Boeing Aerospace, including Phantom Works, the division that is charged with dreaming up Boeing's future tech.

My eleventh-floor corner office looked out at the Pentagon. In the distance I saw the Capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the White House. My furnishings imbued my office with a distinctly nautical air. My family and I lived on Kent Island, Maryland, a small fishing community in the middle of Chesapeake Bay.

I entered the world in Texas, but I'm a Florida boy at heart, long drawn to the mysteries and beauty of the sea. Fishing, scuba diving, seeing the sun glinting off the waves—those were my guilty pleasures. My wife, Jennifer, and I tried to be on the water every weekend, if we could swing it. Since I couldn't be on Kent Island all the time, I figured I would bring Kent Island to my office. I had pictures of my wife and daughters, as well as seascapes painted by my father-in-law, who had been a fine amateur artist in his youth. A wooden ship's wheel hung on the opposite wall.

I also had something you'd probably never find on most people's desks: a hand grenade. It scared the hell out of visitors, because at a glance, most civilians would not perceive that it had been rendered safe by some of my Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) buddies in Afghanistan. You'd have to unscrew the blasting cap to see the empty guts that had once held the explosives. I kept it as a reminder of how fragile and violent life can be.

One early morning while I reviewed a proposal from DHS, my administrative assistant poked her head in my office to tell me that I had two guests waiting for me in our reception area. It was early 2009. I wasn't expecting anyone, and I was only on my first cup of coffee.

I remember staring blankly into the swirls of my coffee, waiting for one of my classified computer systems to fire up, wishing I didn't have unexpected visitors. The encryption that governed some of the technology I used was ridiculously secure, and it often took me ten minutes to pull up a single email.

My assistant knocked on my door again, and introduced me to Jay Stratton and his colleague, whom I'll call Rosemary Caine.

Looking up from my coffee, I saw a serious male in his midthirties, clean-shaven, with piercing eyes. Jay looked familiar, but I hadn't met him before. He wore a fine suit but seemed out of place in it. Instinctively I pegged him as a guy who'd be more comfortable with a machine gun and a bandolier around his chest. Picking out a fellow operator is a game for those of us who've done the work. Something goes awry when one of us dons a suit. It's like forcing a German shepherd into a doggie tuxedo sweater. They can wear it, but it's unnatural.

Rosemary struck me as cool, calm, and beautiful. Only later would I learn that she also spoke fluent Russian and was a former intelligence case officer. Rosemary was one of the few intelligence professionals who would have been just as comfortable on the cover of *Vogue* magazine as sporting camouflage and wielding an AK-47. She could work in any environment, and that's what made her lethal. "Good morning," Jay said, "we've heard a lot about you. It's good to finally meet." Without realizing it, I acknowledged them with a single-syllable grunt.

“My apologies,” I added. “I haven’t had enough coffee this morning.” “Ah, Café Bustelo?” Rosemary said. “I love Cuban coffee.”

I thought: How does she know I’m drinking that brand of coffee? The can was nowhere to be seen. A lucky guess, or something more? Had these two strangers been investigating me?

“Okay,” I said. “What did I do now?” Half-joking, but not really.

“I’m sorry?” Rosemary said.

“You’re obviously here for something, so what did I do now?”

Jay and Rosemary glanced at each other. The blue credentials around their necks were the giveaway that they were both government intelligence officials.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Jay said.

Rosemary approached my desk. “We’re here to talk to you about something very important. A matter of national security.” Nothing new for me.

Everything I did touched on national security.

Still, my visitors had piqued my curiosity.

A short while later, fresh Cuban coffee in hand, Rosemary said, “We are interested in your counterintelligence and security experience for a highly classified program led out of our office at DIA.”

They had come to recruit me to support an intelligence program over at the Defense Intelligence Agency. When a DoD program needs a new person, they sometimes work their network of colleagues to find the right candidate. In this case, Jay and Rosemary’s team needed a senior intelligence officer to set up counterintelligence and security for one of their programs.

Jay explained that he helped create something called the AAWSAP, Advanced Aerospace Weapons System Applications Program, which would later become AATIP (Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program). I’d never heard of the program, and by the time the two of them left my office, I *still* had no idea of the program’s mission. They described it as a small but highly sensitive program focused on “unconventional technologies,” and said they reported directly to the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and to Congress. Some of my past experiences working for Army intelligence had involved protecting high-end and sensitive aerospace technologies, so I just assumed that had made me a candidate. Well, if that were the case, I hoped, the bureaucracy would be minimal. Red tape is the bane of every government official’s existence.

Within the coming weeks, the three of us met twice more. Always in my office over more coffee. We got into the specifics about how I worked, my leadership philosophy, and some of my previous assignments. But we never directly discussed their mysterious program. If nothing else, they assessed my personality and confidence level. Was I the right person for their program? Probably not, but I didn’t care much anyway. I wasn’t looking for any more professional responsibilities other than the ones I already had.

Weeks later, the basic vetting hurdle apparently cleared, they invited me to meet their colleague. The meeting details were as mysterious as the job itself. They instructed me to arrive early, park in the lot across the street from a seemingly civilian office building in Virginia. I would show my credentials to the second security guard (not the first) and take the elevator to the tenth floor. This struck me as a bit over-the-top. Ever since 9/11, security had been tightened, but there is usually little reason to pretend you're James Bond while parking your black Crown Victoria.

On the tenth floor, I found myself in a long, blank hallway with a security door and camera at the far end. Rosemary answered my knock. She offered me coffee and escorted me through the door and into a government cubicle farm full of people working. Finally, in a glass office space along the far wall, I met Dr. James Lacatski.

He was a bona fide rocket scientist, with a doctorate in engineering, and looked every bit the part. Glasses and disheveled hair. A loosened tie. He knew it all, from the brute-force mechanics of Scud missiles to the intricacies of first- and second-stage solid fuel rocket booster engines. I later learned that he was one of our government's top rocket scientists.

"Call me Jim," he said.

In a calm voice, he told me AAWSAP worked on sensitive aviation technology and needed a senior counterintelligence agent to lock down all intel about the program from the usual antagonists, foreign adversaries. They employed many outside contractors, but Jim deliberately handpicked a small cadre of intelligence officers to manage and oversee the work performed by contractors.

Nestled deep inside DIA, a member of the US intelligence community (the IC), AAWSAP drew its authority directly from Congress, according to Jim.

Nothing I'd heard up until now sounded unusual, except that I still didn't know what the program actually did.

After a brief discussion about my experience protecting advanced aerospace technology, Jim paused. The silence between us grew. Then he asked, "What do you think about UFOs?"

What the—? I thought. Is this a joke? Is he testing me in some way?

"I don't . . ." I said.

Jim pounced. "What? You don't believe UFOs are real?"

"I did not say that," I responded. "What I mean is I have no reason to think about them. All of my work has focused on other issues."

None of my professional projects had ever touched on the topic, nor was I particularly interested. In my personal life, I had never been fascinated by the topic. I never got into *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*, and hadn't even seen *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Jim peered at me over his glasses. "That's fair. But don't let your analytical bias get the best of you. You might see things that will challenge your current perception of the universe, of reality. You *must* be prepared to change your opinion in the face of new data and evidence."

What he may or may not have known is that I did have some experience in looking beyond the average person's understanding of reality, which I'll get to later.