

## TOP SECRET, MA NON DEL TUTTO I DISTINTIVI DEI PROGRAMMI MILITARI 'SEGRETI'

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Complotti, missioni speciali e progetti governativi top secret esercitano un profondo fascino nell'immaginario popolare: in equilibrio tra realtà e finzione, cospirazione e fantascienza, anonimato e dis-identità. Cinema, letteratura e cultura pop ne hanno fatto incetta e pochi, tra noi comuni lettori e spettatori, sono immuni dalla passione per il mistero o non si sono mai posti dubbi escatologici sull'esistenza di altre forme di vita nell'universo.

Le ricerche di Trevor Paglen, artista, scrittore e geografo statunitense, ruotano attorno a progetti visivi di inchiesta su programmi militari che il governo Usa riesce a tacere all'opinione pubblica, nonostante gli impressionan-

ti investimenti. Pentagono, Cia e *x-files* sono soggetti ricorrenti di indagini scaturite dalla ricerca di 'prove' come le *patches* raccolte in *I Could Tell You But Then You Have To Be Destroyed by Me* (Melville House Publishing, Brooklyn, 2008-2010).

Si tratta di una raccolta di simboli applicati sulle divise delle unità militari operative in basi aeronautiche segrete, la cui stessa esistenza spesso è dubbia, come quella vicino al lago Groom, nel deserto del Nevada, cioè la famigerata Area 51 dove vengono testati nuovi velivoli fantasma ed esaminati reperti classificati come U.F.O.

I distintivi raccolti da Paglen sfoggiano loghi esoterici a base di occhi e piramidi, acronimi

e messaggi in codice, ma anche figure alieni, astronavi Jedi, demoni e teschi. Certo non mancano i simboli macho, ricorrenti nella cultura visiva militare, come serpenti e aquile a testimoniare i valori di forza, ma anche fedeltà e appartenenza a comunità ristrette, quasi confraternite; oltre a quelli di origine araldica come draghi e spade.

Tutto lascerebbe pensare alla bufala di un burlone. Invece no, le *patches* sono vere e disegnate da membri delle stesse misteriose unità, Men in Black solitamente esposti a fenomeni 'paranormali'. Come paranormali appaiono le simbologie dei distintivi.

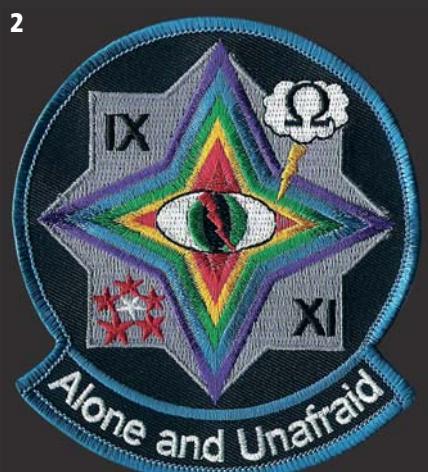
Plots, special missions and top secret government projects all exert a profoundly fascinating allure on our popular imagery: they hover somewhere in the undefined terrain between reality and fiction, conspiracy and science fiction, anonymity and a refutation of identity. The cinema, literature and pop culture have drawn on this so extensively that few, if any, of us ordinary movie-goers and readers can resist the passion for mystery or have never had existential doubts about whether other forms of life exist somewhere out there in the universe.

The research conducted by the American artist, writer and geographer Trevor Paglen hinges on visual investigations of military programmes that the United States gover-

nment manages to keep secret from public opinion, despite the massive investments it makes in the process. The Pentagon, the CIA and X-Files are recurrent buzzwords in the investigations triggered by the search for "evidence", like the patches collected in *I Could Tell You But Then You Would Have To Be Destroyed by Me* (Melville House Publishing, Brooklyn, 2008-2010), a collection of the badges sewn onto the uniforms of the military units operating in secret air bases, whose very existence is often a matter of conjecture, like the one near Lake Groom, in the Nevada desert, which has earned a sinister reputation as the infamous Area 51. The patches collected by Paglen put on a brazen show of esoteric logos based on eyes and pyramids, acronyms and coded messages, as well as figures of aliens, Jedi spaceships, demons and skulls. Of course, there's no shortage of macho symbolism, of the kind to be found in all military visual cultures, such as snakes and eagles bearing witness to valour and strength, but also a sense of belong to and keeping faith with communities so closed as to be almost confraternities, as well as such classical heraldic devices as dragons and swords.

Taken as a whole, it looks more like a prank in questionable taste... but no, the fact is that those patches are real and were designed by the members of their own mysterious units, Men in Black who are used to being exposed to "paranormal" phenomena. Which probably explains why the symbolism used for their badges also looks a bit paranormal.

## TOP SECRET, BUT NOT QUITE THE PATCHES ADOPTED BY "SECRET" MILITARY PROGRAMMES



1 Special Project Flight Test Squadron - Diamond  
2 Alone and Unafrfaid, 2007  
3 Aerospace Medicine



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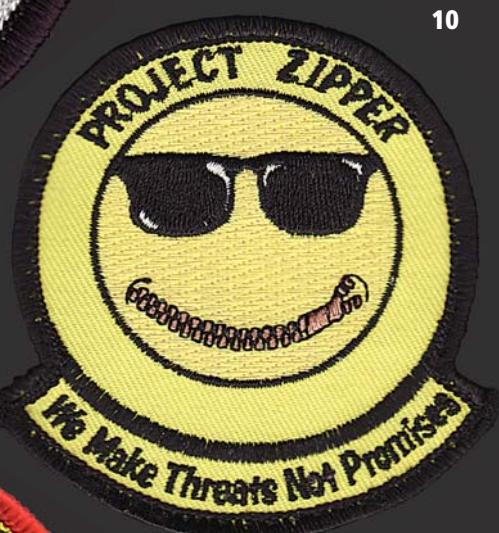


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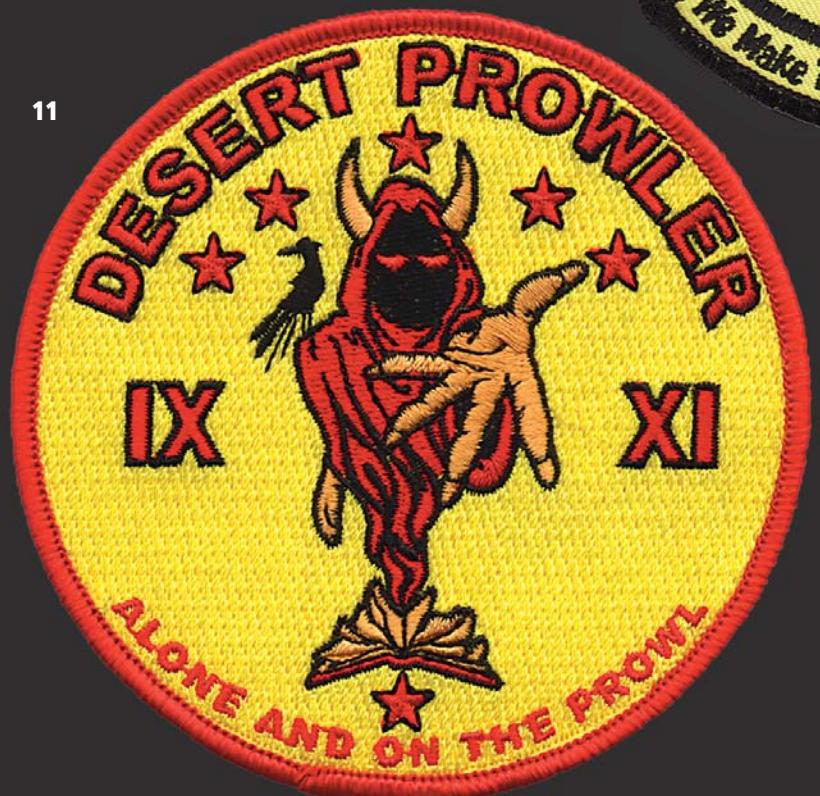


4 Catch a Falling Star, 6594<sup>th</sup> Test Group  
 5 PAN, 2009  
 6 Alien Technology Exploitation Division.  
 Design: Robert Fabian  
 7 G.H.O.S.T.  
 8 Sensor Hunter

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9 Semper En Obscurus

10 Project Zipper, 413<sup>th</sup> Flight Test Squadron

11 Desert Prowler

12 NRO (National Reconnaissance Office), 1990s

13 Grim Reapers, 4451<sup>st</sup> Test Squadron, 1980s

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14 UHF F/O  
15 Melior, National Reconnaissance  
Office Launch 49  
16 Unknown Dragon Patch, 2000s  
17 Range Patch  
18 RAT 55