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Harriet Tubman, Precog

Anomalistics and Science Have Exchanged Roles

**The Pentagon's Secret UFO Program, the Hitchhiker Effect,
and Models of Contagion**

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Why EdgeScience? Because, contrary to public perception, scientific knowledge is still full of unknowns. What remains to be discovered—what we don't know—very likely dwarfs what we do know. And what we think we know may not be entirely correct or fully understood. Anomalies, which researchers tend to sweep under the rug, should be actively pursued as clues to potential breakthroughs and new directions in science.

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The Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) is a professional organization of scientists and scholars who study unusual and unexplained phenomena. The primary goal of the Society is to provide a professional forum for presentations, criticism, and debate concerning topics which are for various reasons ignored or studied inadequately within mainstream science. A secondary goal is to promote improved understanding of those factors that unnecessarily limit the scope of scientific inquiry, such as sociological constraints, restrictive world views, hidden theoretical assumptions, and the temptation to convert prevailing theory into prevailing dogma. Topics under investigation cover a wide spectrum. At one end are apparent anomalies in well established disciplines. At the other, we find paradoxical phenomena that belong to no established discipline and therefore may offer the greatest potential for scientific advancement and the expansion of human knowledge. The SSE was founded in 1982 and has approximately 800 members in 45 countries worldwide. The Society also publishes the peer-reviewed *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, and holds annual meetings in the U.S. and biennial meetings in Europe. Associate and student memberships are available to the public. To join the Society, or for more information, visit the website at scientificexploration.org.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

This is the 50th issue of *EdgeScience* and my last as editor. It's time for some new blood and new ideas. I'd like to thank Garret Model who asked me 14 years ago if I would be interested in starting a magazine for the public for the Society for Scientific Exploration. As a graduate of the masters in magazine journalism program at Syracuse University, how could I say no? The first issue appeared in October 2009. Ever since then Bill Bengston has been an enthusiastic supporter of the magazine through thick and thin. That's largely due to a bevy of wonderful writers, who have contributed their thoughts and work over the years. A big thank you as well to Laura Smyth whose beautiful design for the magazine has been widely appreciated, and to David Moncrief, my most recent associate editor, who has been there to back me up, raising excellent questions and catching any potential embarrassments along the way. Taking the magazine forward will be Annalisa Ventola, who is well qualified to take over the reins of the magazine. Please join me in giving her a hearty welcome.—Patrick Huyghe



Pieter Bruegel

Henry Bauer

Anomalistics and Science Have Exchanged Roles

Anomalistics might be somehow stimulated in reaction to or protest against science, or by a felt need for knowledge or understanding beyond what science offers.

Pundits in various disciplines have suggested a cycle: romanticism as reaction against Enlightenment rationality, followed by a return to rationalism as “science” became hegemonic. Thus in the second half of the 19th century, interest in psychic phenomena—mediumship, poltergeists, Spiritualism, and the like—might be seen as reaction against the materialist implications of natural selection, proposed by Darwin and by Wallace in mid-century; but materialistic science then won out through impressive achievements in many areas.

The perceived reliability and authority of science reached a high point through the scientific-technological achievements during World War II: not only atom bombs but also sonar, radar, and more. In seeming reaction, following WWII there was much heightened public interest in matters apparently ignored or disdained by science—Loch Ness Monsters, “abominable snowmen” (yeti, Bigfoot, Sasquatch), flying saucers, psychic phenomena, and Velikovsky’s scenario of interplanetary phenomena (Dutch 1986, Bauer 1986/87).

Although these movements were some sort of reaction *against* mainstream science, the authority of science—on matters of temporal knowledge, at least—was acknowledged, even if only implicitly, among religious believers as well as those concerned with topics nowadays included within the umbrella of anomalistics. Thus it was generally accepted that the topics neglected or dismissed or seen as in some way outside or antagonistic to mainstream science ought to be investigated in the manner that science was thought to work, namely, basing theories and interpretations on replicable, trustworthy facts. That is illustrated by the name chosen for the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE): the topics ignored by mainstream researchers should be looked into by making facts and evidence the primary concern, at least initially.

Science was the acknowledged role model for anomalistics, in other words. But today, the roles are reversed. How did things get this way?

The mainstream response to anomalistics was usually just to ignore it, unless a particular subject gained too much favorable public interest—as was the case for instance in the Velikovsky affair (Bauer 1984).

More or less contemporary with the founding of SSE there was a movement by self-styled “Skeptics” seeking to ensure that anything incompatible with contemporary mainstream scientific consensus should be given no shrift at all and consigned to the pejorative limbo of “pseudoscience.”¹ As Marcello Truzzi (1987) pointed out, they were (and remain) not genuine Skeptics but rather *pseudoskeptics*, not at all skeptical about mainstream science, which they trust wholeheartedly.²

Anomalistics has been largely the purview of amateurs, of people looking into topics out of sheer interest, as had been largely the case at the beginnings of “modern” science. The founders of modern science had not earned their living from their scientific efforts, and nowadays there are few if any genuine anomalists who earn their living from devotion to or obsession with their unorthodox pursuit. As I suggested long ago (Bauer 1982), as part of the frequent discussions over seeking research funding for anomalous projects, anomalists should rather enjoy the fact that they are not beholden—as mainstream researchers are—to purse-string holders whose support is inevitably contingent on doing what the patrons want: researchers in the mainstream are increasingly preoccupied by the need to continually gain grants for their work to establish or further their careers, to the detriment of truly free inquiry.

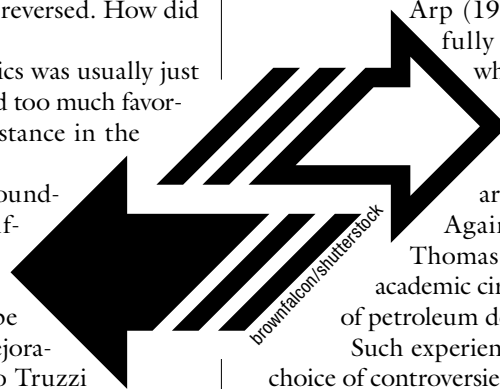
Over time, anomalists came across indications that the dogmatism exemplified by the (pseudo)Skeptics groups was also present to a certain extent within the scientific community. That had been noted by sociologist Bernard Barber in his sorely neglected 1961 article “Resistance by Scientists to Scientific Discovery,” published in the journal *Science*. Similar instances in medicine may be somewhat better known, for instance the iconic case of Ignaz Semmelweis, who was long ignored by his colleagues for stressing the need for cleanliness when delivering babies. Not nearly as well-known is the generality of “Hidden Events” below the mainstream’s horizon, for example the failure of practicing physicians to recognize the phenomenon of physically abused children (Westrum 1982).

At any rate, members of SSE caught glimpses of mainstream science’s dogmatism not only from its attitude to “outside” topics such as parapsychology, cryptozoology, ufology, and the like but also within mainstream science itself in its dismissing or ignoring or maligning of unorthodox claims on perfectly mainstream topics: on occasion, accomplished mainstream researchers described being ignored or dismissed or maligned for making technical claims within their own discipline. Halton

Arp (1987, 1998, 2000), for instance, was a fully respected observational astronomer who was essentially excommunicated—no longer allowed telescope time—after he pointed to seemingly convincing evidence that cosmological redshifts are not due solely to the Doppler effect.

Again, the highly respected astrophysicist Thomas Gold (1989) could get no hearing in academic circles for his suggestions about the origin of petroleum deposits on Earth.

Such experiences as a member of SSE stimulated my choice of controversies in science as my special research interest in the general field of Science & Technology Studies (STS); and that led to finding quite a lot of cases like those of Arp and Gold (Bauer 2012), most strikingly the mistaken mainstream



dogmas that AIDS is caused by HIV (Bauer 2007) and that global warming and climate change are being caused chiefly by human actions that release carbon dioxide (Koonin 2021).

The traditional and popular view of scientific activity is that evidence is gathered and hypotheses are evaluated by their ability to explain Nature's facts; and that all theories—and even facts—are tentative and provisional, since the history of science is replete with examples of later discoveries requiring modification or even abandonment of earlier theories; to give only one example, that some of the so-called “inert” gases can indeed react to form compounds.

That traditional, idealistic view of science may have been reasonably accurate in the founding years of “modern” science, but it is far from appropriate about today's scientific activity, where a whole host of outside interests have produced a hot-house culture of extreme competition, restricted goals of research in favor of the interests of those who pay for the research, and pervasive dogmatism about any contemporary mainstream consensus: deviation from that consensus is punished by unfavorable peer reviews, absence of invitations to conferences or seminars, and failure to obtain research support from the usual sources; the case of the molecular biologist Peter Duesberg may be iconic (Bauer 2012: ch. 3, Lenzer 2008).

Contemporary scientific activity does not have the contexts needed for genuinely productive research, for which physicist John Ziman (1994: 276) has summarized the requirements (*italics in original*):

- social space for personal initiative and creativity;
- *time* for ideas to grow to maturity;
- *openness* to debate and criticism;
- hospitality towards *novelty*; and
- respect for specialized *expertise*.

However, all those requirements are present almost inevitably in the investigations pursued by anomalists. On anomalous topics, there exists no monolithic, hegemonic paradigm enforced through control of peer review, publication, and provision of research support. And although anomalist studies are not welcome to mainstream science, anomalists nevertheless typically show “respect for specialized expertise” by seeking advice and even collaboration from mainstream scientists, some of whom are willing to become involved, even if only secretly and publicly unacknowledged.

Anomalistics is thus comparable to the early years of “modern” science.

The roles of science and anomalistics have evidently been exchanged. Contemporary science is an impossible, even undesirable role model for the investigation of controversial or unorthodox matters. Instead, research scientists should take as their role model the approach taken by serious modern-day anomalists, placing the emphasis on facts and evidence rather than preconceived theories. It needs to be recognized that mainstream scientific activity nowadays is sadly corrupted and quite different from the relatively disinterested days of natural philosophy and early “modern” science. In Ziman's terms, today's science fails to be hospitable to any novelty that does not comport with the current “scientific consensus.”³

Science, not anomalistics, is now society's problem.

ENDNOTES

1. So a rationalist backlash against perceived unscientific “romanticism.”
2. “Both critics and proponents need to learn to think of adjudication in science as more like that found in the law courts, imperfect and with varying degrees of proof and evidence. Absolute truth, like absolute justice, is seldom obtainable. We can only do our best to approximate them.” So Truzzi (1987) gave a rationale for a Science Court, but he did not mention it in that article.
3. Abba Eban is credited with the insight that consensus means stating collectively what no one believes individually.

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Eric Wargo

Harriet Tubman, Precog

“My people are free!” “My people are free!” She came down to breakfast singing the words in a sort of ecstasy. She could not eat. The dream or vision filled her whole soul, and physical needs were forgotten.

Mr. Garnet said to her: “Oh, Harriet! Harriet! You’ve come to torment us before the time; do cease this noise! My grandchildren may see the day of the emancipation of our people, but you and I will never see it.”

“I tell you, sir, you’ll see it, and you’ll see it soon. My people are free! My people are free.”

When, three years later, President Lincoln’s proclamation of emancipation was given forth, and there was a great jubilee among the friends of the slaves, Harriet was continually asked, “Why do you not join with the rest in their rejoicing!”

“Oh,” she answered, “I had my jubilee three years ago. I rejoiced all I could then; I can’t rejoice no more.¹

Harriet Tubman’s achievements—liberating large numbers of slaves from Maryland farms and then helping lead Union forces in a major action during the Civil War—earned her a central place in the story of the struggle against slavery in America. After the war, she became a suffrage activist and tirelessly supported poor Black people in Auburn, New York, using funds from her public speaking and donations. Ever since, she has been a beacon for Black Americans and feminists—almost the perfect icon and figurehead for multiple intersecting identities and struggles against oppression.

I say “almost” because there’s that nagging biographical detail, which Tubman’s abolitionist friends and contemporaries struggled to assimilate within the larger picture of this complex woman, and which most historians since then have either rejected outright or minimized: her propensity to have what we would now call precognitive dreams and visions, as well as her claims to have been frequently guided to safety by the voice of God.

Tubman never learned to read or write, so despite years describing her exploits to lecture audiences after the Civil War—she was a brilliant and witty storyteller, by all accounts—we today are limited to hearing her story mediated by others.² It presents difficulties trying to extract the “actual, historical” Harriet Tubman from the various religious, scientific, racial, and political biases of her biographers, not to mention onion-like layers of hagiography and mythmaking that have grown up around her.³

As a conductor on the Underground Railroad, Tubman earned the appellation “Moses,” but there was as much or even

more of Joan of Arc in the dreaming and gun-toting freedom fighter. Because so many children’s stories about Tubman play up that comparison, serious biographers have had a hard time believing the supernatural aspects of Tubman’s story, assuming that her dreams and talking to God must simply be parts of the myth, or at best symptomatic of slave superstition or even brain disorder. But I will argue in what follows that, despite their anecdotal nature—with history and biography, we’re inevitably in the realm of anecdote—the abundant claims made independently by Tubman’s many abolitionist associates, friends, and early biographers add up to a picture that historians of the supernatural should not ignore. Tubman does seem to have



Benjamin Powelson

regularly experienced precognition both in dreams and in her waking life, even if she herself used a religious idiom to describe and explain those experiences. Her story is consistent with what has been reported by other, better-studied psychic individuals in more recent times, including military remote viewers and contemporary precognitive dreamers.

Tubman's Origins and Anti-Slavery Career

Tubman was born Araminta (“Minty”) Ross, probably in early 1822, on a plantation in Dorchester County, on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, owned by a prominent local landowner named Anthony Thompson.⁴ Her father, Ben Ross, was the property of Thompson, but her mother, Harriet “Rit” Green, was owned by Thompson’s stepson, Edward Brodess. When she was one or two, Minty Ross along with her four older siblings and mother were taken away from their father and brought to Brodess’s plantation 10 miles away in Bucktown (also in Dorchester County). By law, the young Ross belonged to Brodess, but he frequently hired her out to other whites in the area, a common practice. Separation from her mother and siblings during these long stretches away from the Brodess plantation was itself painful, and adding to the suffering, some of these temporary masters were quite cruel. Two of the defining traumas of her childhood, potentially relevant to the expression of her psychic abilities, occurred during these stints.

Probably around age 7 or 8, Ross was hired out to a married woman, “Miss Susan,” to work as a maid and nurse for her newborn. Miss Susan was sociopathically abusive, even by slave-master standards—brutally whipping the child on her first day of work for not knowing how to dust furniture, and so on. The mistreatment appalled even Susan’s visiting sister, who insisted Susan stop hurting her. The detail that is potentially relevant to the psychic story I’ll be telling is that Miss Susan made her young slave stay awake, long into the night, every night, to rock the cradle of her “cross, sick child” to keep it from crying. We’ll see later why this could be important.

The episode that has received more attention from biographers is a severe head injury Ross received probably in her very early teens, after having been hired out to break flax for “the worst man in the neighborhood.” While she was on an errand to a dry-goods store for this temporary master, an overseer from a neighboring farm commanded Ross to help restrain one of his slaves who had fled and taken refuge inside. Ross refused, and the overseer hurled a two-pound scale weight at the fleeing man, which fell short and hit her instead, breaking her skull. Ross was given no medical care and was made to return to work after a day in bed, but she kept fainting, and blood and sweat running into her eyes made it impossible to see. Her temporary master returned her to Brodess as worthless, and Brodess was unable to sell her thereafter because of her injury.

Ross experienced frequent headaches the rest of her life as a consequence of her head injury. She also suffered extreme lethargy and a tendency to fall spontaneously into deep, non-restful slumber. Biographer Kate Clifford Larson argues that her narcoleptic episodes as well as her lifelong religiosity and belief in the reality of her frequent dreams and visions were

results of temporal lobe epilepsy precipitated by the injury—a plausible but also problematic assumption that I will also consider later.

Ross took the name Harriet Tubman in 1844, at age 22, when she married a free Black man named John Tubman. She remained the property of Brodess until the farm passed to his wife upon his death in March 1849—a death Tubman had started explicitly praying for just a little over a week before it happened. There was growing fear among the slaves that, despite promises to the contrary, some of them would be sold away into far worse conditions on the malarial rice plantations farther to the south, where any escape to freedom was less imaginable. Beset by persistent dreams of horsemen and the terrified screams of women and children, Harriet talked much of escape, even though her husband ridiculed and belittled her aspirations. There is no indication that these dreams were a specific premonitory warning or that it was a dream that finally prompted her escape. It was after learning (in the usual way) that two of her sisters had been sold away on a chain-gang, and fearing that she was next, that she finally made her decision to escape in autumn of that year.

Tubman made an initial abortive attempt with two of her brothers, but they changed their minds and wouldn’t continue, so she made her second, successful attempt alone. The Underground Railroad was already a well-functioning secret network at that point, made up of free Blacks, slaves, Quakers, and other anti-slavery whites, as well as white people simply willing to shelter escaped slaves in exchange for payment. (By the late 1840s, hundreds of slaves escaped from the Eastern Shore each year, prompting slaveowners’ increased vigilance.) Aided by a local white woman to whom she gave her favorite bed quilt in exchange for her help, and following the North Star as her compass, Tubman made her way to the safe haven of Philadelphia in autumn of 1849. Having spent nearly three decades enslaved, crossing the Pennsylvania state line was like being reborn: “I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person,” she later recalled to Sarah H. Bradford, one of her early biographers. “There was such a glory over every thing; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.”⁵

Over the following decade, Tubman made multiple stealthy trips back to the Eastern Shore—including back to the farm she had fled from—to bring her family members and many other slaves to freedom.⁶ These adventures have been widely told, often with embellishment, in children’s books. Popular accounts based on Bradford’s writings often claim that Tubman freed 300 slaves on 19 such missions, but historians now agree that Bradford’s figures are inflated. The truth is still impressive: Larson’s careful research points to 13 separate missions and approximately 70 slaves directly led to freedom by Tubman, who also left instructions for many more to make their own way north, in what became a “stampede” of fugitives by the late 1850s.⁷ The Fugitive Slave Act, which legally obligated Northerners to return escaped slaves to their Southern masters, was passed in 1850, and although widely resented and often ignored, it made life for escaped slaves perilous even in Northern states. So Tubman’s missions



Raid of Second South Carolina Volunteers (Colonel James Montgomery) at the Combahee River, June 2, 1863. *Harper's Weekly*

carried her and her companions from Maryland to Ontario, in Canada, enlisting the aid of a wide network of abolitionists and fellow Underground Railroad conductors all along the way.

Tubman's skill moving secretly through dangerous enemy territory, utilizing disguise and trickery to evade detection, made her a legend among Maryland slaves—who called the mysterious (and, many assumed, male) liberator Moses. Her disguises were varied, including dressing as a man, but one of her favorite tactics was hiding in plain sight, pretending to be an old or confused woman. On one of her missions, she avoided the gaze of her former master by making a deliberate commotion with some chickens she was holding. Effectively she cloaked herself within the prejudices of her enemies, who never imagined a Black woman going about her daily business could pose a threat.⁸ On another occasion she approached and essentially flirted with some Irish laborers working on a Delaware bridge that her large party needed to cross. She struck up a conversation and intimated to them that she was looking for a white man to marry, successfully distracting the fellows long enough that her fugitives could slip by unnoticed. Although her missions were perilous and there was a price on her own head as well as those of many of her charges, she was fond of boasting that she “never lost a passenger.”

Tubman's skills and experience using secret slave communications networks also made her a valuable asset in larger antislavery actions that were planned. In 1858, militant white abolitionist John Brown sought Tubman's aid in planning his raid at Harper's Ferry, Virginia (now, West Virginia), which was intended to foment a slave uprising in that state. Then in April 1859, Tubman helped antislavery activists in Troy, New York, stage a daring rescue of a fugitive slave, Charles Nalle, from U.S. Marshalls. She began by infiltrating the U.S. commissioner's office where Nalle's fate was being contested by lawyers, in the guise of “a somewhat antiquated colored woman” (as the local newspaper reported) wearing a conspicuous sun bonnet. She sat unnoticed amid the proceedings and then, when the authorities decided to move Nalle to a more secure nearby courthouse, she signaled the mob outside and then led them in prying Nalle from the grip of authorities and conveying him to a waiting ferry on a nearby waterfront.

The climax of Tubman's anti-slavery career came at the beginning of June 1863, when after an initial scouting mission to gather intelligence on enemy locations, she helped Union Colonel James Montgomery (a former compatriot of John Brown's) lead a force of Union soldiers up the Combahee River in South Carolina, routing Confederate forces, setting plantations and storehouses ablaze, and liberating more than

700 slaves. She is widely claimed to be the first woman to lead U.S. troops in a Civil War battle.⁹

“Omens, Dreams, and Warnings”

The first person to tell Tubman’s story in print and “out” her as the legendary Moses who had struck so many blows against Southern slaveowners was Boston schoolteacher and journalist Franklin Sanborn. Sanborn first met Tubman in 1858 via the network of abolitionists who were secretly funding Brown’s planned raid, and Tubman came to trust the writer as a genuine ally in the anti-slavery cause. Telling the rudiments of her story in 1863 in the antislavery newspaper he edited, *The Boston Commonwealth*, Sanborn paints a compelling picture of a cunning tactician and fearless fighter in the cause of civil rights. He also admired her spy-like caution, for instance her practice of carefully quizzing strangers (including Sanborn, on their first meeting) with daguerrotypes of mutual abolitionist friends, to ensure her visitors were who they claimed to be.¹⁰

In his article, Sanborn described Tubman as “the most shrewd and practical person in the world, yet she is a firm believer in omens, dreams, and warnings.”¹¹ Pay attention to that “yet.” The journalist had difficulty reconciling Tubman’s paramilitary prowess with her interesting but hard-to-explain inner life, and this difficulty is a theme running through pretty much everything that has been written about Tubman since. Then as now, the sciences were ascendant among many educated persons like Sanborn, and with that came inherent skepticism at claims of miracles and the supernatural. Yet, despite sympathy with readers’ inevitable doubts, Sanborn felt strongly that this “singular trait”¹² in Tubman’s character was too important to be ignored.

For example, Sanborn described Tubman’s flying dreams that may have been what we now call out-of-body experiences:

She declares that before her escape from slavery, she used to dream of flying over fields and towns, and rivers and mountains, looking down upon them “like a bird,” and reaching at last a great fence, or sometimes a river, over which she would try to fly, “but it appeared like I wouldn’t have the strength, and just as I was sinking down, there would be ladies all dressed in white over there, and they would put out their arms and pull me across.” There is nothing strange in this, perhaps, but she declares that when she came North she remembered these very places as those she had seen in her dreams, and many of the ladies who befriended her were those she had been helped by in her visions.¹³

Sanborn also wrote that on dangerous missions during the mid-1850s, after a reward had been offered for her capture, “she several times was on the point of being taken, but always escaped by her quick wit, or by ‘warnings’ from Heaven . . .”¹⁴ These warnings, he wrote, came to her often as a fluttering in her heart. “She says she inherited this power, that her father could always predict the weather, and that he foretold the Mexican war.”¹⁵

Bradford, the first individual to attempt a book-length biography of Tubman, was of a similar mind to Sanborn. Her two books on Tubman—a hastily composed set of personal reminiscences and letters published in 1869 as *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* and then a more polished but also more sanitized version published in 1886 as *Harriet: The Moses of Her People*—relate several of Tubman’s claimed “dreams and visions.” But like Sanborn, Bradford was quick to signal the delicacy of the subject of Tubman’s supernatural experiences and her own semi-ambivalence toward them.¹⁶ She claims she limited the stories in her book to those that could be verified by others or that she had witnessed firsthand, for fear of bringing too much discredit on her subject.¹⁷

Bradford reported witnessing episodes of religious rapture in Tubman, as well as the apparent facility with out-of-body travel that Sanborn mentioned: “When the turns of somnolence come upon Harriet, her ‘spirit,’ as she says, goes away from her body, and visits other scenes and places, and if she ever really sees them afterwards they are perfectly familiar to her and she can find her way about alone.”¹⁸

In her first book, Bradford reproduces an account related to her in a letter by Wilmington, Delaware, abolitionist Thomas Garrett, describing what has become one of Tubman’s most famous exploits as a conductor on the Underground Railroad: leading a small group including two “stout men” to freedom. (Larson suggests this episode may have occurred in the spring of 1856.) Garrett relates that about 30 miles south of Wilmington,

God told her to stop, which she did; and then asked him what she must do. He told her to leave the road, and turn to the left; she obeyed, and soon came to a small stream of tide water; there was no boat, no bridge; she again inquired of her Guide what she was to do. She was told to go through.¹⁹

Despite the cold—it was March—Tubman had complete confidence in her divine guide, so she began wading across, the water rising as high as her armpits. The men refused to follow her until they saw her safely reach the far shore but then entered the frigid water. The group then had to ford a second stream before they found the cabin of a Black family who gave them shelter and dried their clothes. Tubman left them some undergarments in payment, but contracted a respiratory ailment from the ordeal—she was barely able to speak when she and her party arrived in Wilmington two days later. Garrett adds “the strange part of the story”: that Tubman and party discovered when they came out of hiding that the fugitives’ master had put up reward posters for them at a nearby train station, suggesting by implication that Tubman’s unexpected course of action may indeed have saved them from being caught.²⁰ Bradford retold this story in her second biography and added that she had also heard the story from Tubman herself on multiple occasions.²¹

Another oft-retold story first reported by Bradford is associated with one of those allegedly accurate somatic presentiments Sanborn mentioned: Tubman became “much troubled

in spirit about her three brothers, feeling sure that some great evil was impending over their heads.”²² So she enlisted a friend to write a letter for her to a literate free Black man in the area where her brothers lived, named Jacob Jackson, indicating in code that her brothers should be ready for her arrival. The message evaded detection by inspectors who were reading Jackson’s mail, and her arrival came, she said, just in the nick of time:

When Harriet arrived there, it was the day before Christmas, and she found her three brothers, who had attempted to escape, were advertised to be sold on Christmas day to the highest bidder, to go down to the cotton and rice fields with the chain gang. . . . When the holidays were over, and the men came for the three brothers to sell them, they could not be found.²³

There is no way to verify the accuracy of Tubman’s claimed presentiments—for instance that she knew in advance the urgency of going to rescue her brothers, or that God’s voice directed her to ford a stream because pursuers were close to catching them. Nor is there any way to verify the claims that Tubman had actually seen her future refuges and helpers in her dreams or out-of-body travels—which would make those experiences “veridical” in the language of parapsychologists. But slaves she had helped to freedom witnessed these kinds of marvels firsthand and held her in awe because of them.

When Black novelist and historian William Wells Brown interviewed former slaves in Canada in 1860, they told him that “Moses has the charm”—a kind of superhuman charisma. “The whites can’t catch Moses, cause you see she’s born with the charm. The Lord has given Moses the power.”²⁴ Brown also wrote that Black soldiers in camps Tubman visited during the Civil War “would have died for this woman, for they believed that she had a charmed life.”²⁵ Tubman herself believed this, saying that the charm gave her courage, “nerved her up” in adversity and did the same for her followers. In her totally confident hands, they felt safe.

There seemed to be more to this quality than just courage. Sanborn, trying to explain Tubman’s charm, attributed it to her intelligence and her heavenly warnings. Thomas Garrett, in his letter to Bradford, attributed it to her overriding trust and confidence in God, her guide:

[I]n truth I never met with any person, of any color, who had more confidence in the voice of God, as spoken direct to her soul. She has frequently told me that she talked with God, and he talked with her every day of her life, and she has declared to me that she felt no more fear of being arrested by her former master, or any other person, when in his immediate neighborhood, than she did in the State of New York, or Canada, for she said she never ventured [anywhere except] where God sent her, and her faith in a Supreme Power truly was great.²⁶

Although less colorful and dramatic than the alleged presentiments guiding Tubman in her rescue missions, friends and

associates reported other remarkable, seemingly “clairvoyant” episodes centered on specific sums of money being sent or set aside for her—first to finance her missions and then, after the Civil War, to support the poor Black people she boarded at her home in Auburn, New York. For instance, Garrett recounted a visit in which she said, “God tells me you have money for me.” “Well!” he exclaimed, “how much does thee want?” “About twenty-three dollars,” Tubman answered. Garret writes that he “then gave her twenty-four dollars and some odd cents, the net proceeds of five pounds sterling, received through Eliza Wigham, of Scotland, for her.”²⁷ This was the first time Tubman had come to Garrett for money, and the first time that he actually had received a donation for her, so the timing as well as the precision are interesting.

Tubman called on Garrett again a year later, saying God had told her he once more had “some money for her, but not so much as before.” The abolitionist had indeed, just a few days prior, received the equivalent of one pound and ten shillings sent from Europe for her cause. “To say the least,” Garrett noted, “there was something remarkable in these facts, whether clairvoyance, or the divine impression on her mind from the source of all power, I cannot tell; but certain it was she had a guide within herself other than the written word, for she never had any education.”²⁸

Bradford reported that, on another occasion, Tubman “received an intimation in some mysterious or supernatural way” that her parents needed rescue and “asked the Lord where she should go for the money to enable her to go for them.” In answer, she was “directed to the office of a certain gentleman, a friend of the slaves, in New York,” whom she asked for \$20, explaining that the Lord had sent her. Incredulous and having no money for her, the gentleman said, “Well I guess the Lord’s mistaken this time.” Undeterred, Tubman sat and slept the whole day, arousing the attention of visitors to the office, who shared stories of her exploits. “At all events she came to full consciousness, at last, to find herself the happy possessor of *sixty dollars*, the contribution of these strangers. She went on her way rejoicing to bring her old parents from the land of bondage.”²⁹

In a revised edition of her second biography of Tubman, Bradford also recalled an episode some years later, when she forwarded a \$7 donation for Tubman to a prominent woman physician in Auburn, New York, who was acting as Tubman’s treasurer. Bradford later received a letter from the physician saying Tubman had previously come to her asking for a \$7 loan to pay her bills and promising she could repay the debt the following Tuesday. Teasing her, the physician had asked her how she could trust that the debt would be repaid on Tuesday, to which Tubman reiterated her promise, saying “I can’t just tell you how.” The physician received Bradford’s package with the \$7 for Tubman on the Tuesday in question. “Others thought this strange, but there was nothing strange about it to her.”³⁰

Ghosting John Brown

Besides Tubman’s oft-quoted dream of Emancipation that caused her to rejoice three years ahead of the actual event, the

best-known of Tubman's dreams, and the only one recorded in much detail, is a recurring dream that she told Sanborn had preceded her first meeting with John Brown in St. Catharines, Ontario, in April 1858. Brown, it must be noted, was already in awe of Tubman, calling her "the General," and desperately hoped for the seasoned guerrilla's participation in the raid he had been planning—for several years by that point—to conduct on Harper's Ferry.³¹ Sanborn writes that, in Tubman's dreams,

She thought she was in "a wilderness sort of place, all full of rocks and bushes," when she saw a serpent raise its head among the rocks, and as it did so, it became the head of an old man with a long white beard, gazing at her "wishful like, just as if he were going to speak to me," and then two other heads rose up beside him, younger than he,—and as she stood looking at them, and wondering what they could want with her, a great crowd of men rushed in and struck down the younger heads, and then the head of the old man, still looking at her so "wishful." This dream she had again and again, and could not interpret it; but, when she met Captain Brown, shortly after, behold, he was the very image of the head she had seen. But still she could not make out what her dream signified, till the news came to her of the tragedy of Harper's Ferry, and then she knew the two other heads were his two sons.³²

Brown's plan was to lead an army of volunteers, including fugitive slaves, to take over the armory in Harper's Ferry. They were going to distribute the weapons to the local slaves, enabling them to rise against the slaveowners. The idea was to deplete Virginia of its slaves, county by county, in a growing movement that would ultimately shatter the slave economy throughout the South. After a year's postponement, Brown finally led his crusade on October 16, 1859, with the help of only 21 men—far fewer than what he had hoped for.

According to Sanborn, Tubman was in New York at the time and "felt her usual warning that something was wrong—she could not tell what. Finally she told her hostess that it must be Captain Brown who was in trouble, and that they should soon hear bad news from him. The next day's newspaper brought tidings of what had happened."³³ The tiny force had successfully captured the armory and cut off telegraph communication to the outside world; but a railroad carried news to a neighboring town and a militia was summoned to put down the insurrection. One of Brown's participating sons escaped, but two were killed. Brown himself was captured, tried, found guilty, and executed by hanging on December 2.

One of the big question marks in Tubman's life centers on her absence at that ill-fated raid. In her initial meetings with Brown and his followers in April 1858, she was enthusiastic and proceeded to help him recruit volunteers among former slaves in Ontario. She met with him again as late as May 1859. Yet strangely, Tubman was nowhere to be found in the summer and fall of that year as the planned action drew near. All efforts of Brown's followers to locate her failed. Sanborn suggested that



John Brown, 1859

Martin M. Lawrence

perhaps she fell sick or had to attend her sick parents. But it has occurred to some historians like Larson that Tubman may have realized the flaws in Brown's plan and feigned being sick to avoid his disapproval—"ghosting" him, as we would now say.

I'm not aware of historians drawing a connection between Tubman's absence at Harper's Ferry and her famous dream about Brown, but it strikes me as an obvious piece of the puzzle. Tubman was a conscious shaper of her own story, and that would have included her divulgements to her white biographers like Sanborn about her dreams and how she interpreted them—or in this case, didn't interpret them. Assuming the dream account itself is true and faithfully told, I find it implausible that someone as attuned to her dreamlife as Tubman was would be able to tell that the serpent in her dream was Brown upon meeting him but only recognize the ominous symbolism (the serpent-heads being struck down) *after* the failed raid. Was it the dream that kept her away? Might it at least have confirmed a conscious inkling that, however noble Brown's intentions in making open war on Southern slavery, his crusade was doomed to end in failure?³⁴

There is no way of knowing, but I believe circumstances do point to the dream-story's authenticity. Why invent such an obviously dark oniric prophecy about her friend and ally Brown that she obviously did not act on (i.e., she didn't warn or dissuade him). Relating it to Sanborn as a dream that she just didn't understand the meaning of until too late seems

like a judicious compromise. Interestingly, and I suspect also relevantly, Sanborn reported that Tubman retained a practically religious devotion to Brown after his death, saying that it was God who died at the gallows that day, not a mere man. A Freudian, attuned to how people often overcompensate for unconscious guilt feelings, might have something to say about that devotion.

Other precognitive dreams of Tubman were reported by her friends after the Civil War. For instance, in late January 1884, Tubman visited friend and fellow suffragist Eliza Wright Osborne and told her host some “mysterious dreams and thoughts that had come to her” that were troubling, including a dream about a week before in which she “saw so many people drowning and some burning up.” Osborne showed her a newspaper from the time of the dream, reporting on the wreck of the steamer *City of Columbus* off Martha’s Vineyard, in which more than 100 lives were lost—among them, many women and children. Tubman said she “had not heard of it.”³⁵

In the revised edition of her second Tubman biography, issued in 1901, Bradford included several pages of new material based in part on recent interviews with her subject. There were additional dreams, including one about a terrible earthquake:

She woke from a sleep one day in great agitation, and ran to the houses of her colored neighbors, exclaiming that “a dreadful thing was happening somewhere, the ground was opening, and the houses were falling in, and the people being killed faster than they was in the war—faster than they was in the war.”

At that very time, or near it, an earthquake was occurring in the northern part of South America, for the telegram came that day, though why a vision of it should be sent to Harriet no one can divine.³⁶

There is no date given for this dream or the earthquake, but it was probably the devastating San Narciso earthquake that caused fissures in the ground, building collapses, and many deaths in towns near the Venezuelan coastal capital of Caracas in 1900.

Bradford also reported how Tubman learned in a dream of the unexpected death of young Fanny Seward, a friend of hers and the daughter of Lincoln’s Secretary of State, William H. Seward:

Sitting in her house one day, deep sleep fell upon her, and in a dream or vision she saw a chariot in the air, going south, and empty, but soon it returned, and lying in it, cold and stiff, was the body of a young lady of whom Harriet was very fond, whose home was in Auburn, but who had gone to Washington with her father, a distinguished officer of the Government there.

The shock roused Harriet from her sleep, and she ran into Auburn, to the house of her minister, crying out: “Oh, Miss Fanny is dead!” and the news had just been received.³⁷

Fanny Seward died in October 1866, so this story was likely based on notes from interviews Bradford had conducted years earlier, for her first biography of Tubman.³⁸ She may have left it out of that book because of its uncomfortably supernatural-sounding subject matter.

Explaining Away

Unsurprisingly, given the variable nature of the evidence and the fact that it all dates from a fading, sepia-toned past, skepticism still clouds the reports of Tubman’s premonitory dreams and presentiments. While a few of the above stories have found their way (sometimes embellished) into children’s books or writings and videos on dreams or the paranormal,³⁹ serious biographers have minimized or wholly ignored this dimension of Tubman. At best, it is considered an unverifiable and unexamined “subjective side” of her story, as historian Milton C. Sernett puts it—part of Tubman’s “non-white religious self.”⁴⁰

What was that religious self? Tubman’s background was probably a mélange of many faith traditions and practices. The Brodesses were Methodists, and Tubman and her fellow slaves were forced to attend Methodist services. But there may have also been Baptist, Episcopal, and Catholic influences (Tubman fasted on Fridays, for instance—a mainly Catholic practice), as well as influences from increasingly popular Black evangelical churches, which subversively preached the promise of deliverance from enslavement. To these various flavors of Christianity must probably be added West African beliefs and traditions, which included beliefs in magic and divination and the reality of prophetic dreams.⁴¹ There is reason to think that at least one of Tubman’s grandparents was brought on a slave ship from what is now Ghana, on the Gold Coast; and as a child she was told that her heritage was Asante, one of the main ethnic groups of that region. Whatever went into the mix, Tubman’s was a vivid and daily—or constant—lived experience of a real and vital connection to a higher power. Biographer Jean Humez writes that “Tubman’s God emerges . . . as an approachable partner and unfailing support for those who were righting wrongs. God was her name for the source of visionary guidance for her antislavery action. Prayer enabled her to tap directly into the source of such guidance.”⁴²

Nor would Tubman’s earliest biographers have had much besides a religious idiom in which to explain her experiences—indeed a much narrower Christian idiom—and this accounts for some of the hesitation shown toward her stories. Most white Christians of the time believed that God heard their prayers, but the idea that God talked back was not yet the mainstream belief that it became for white evangelicals in the next century.⁴³ A Presbyterian, Bradford herself was uncomfortable with the idea of Tubman actually getting a reply when she talked to God, as in the episode with the cold river-crossing.⁴⁴

Especially in the latter part of the 19th century, there were alternative framings that writers could have drawn on, had they been cognizant of them. The new religious movement Spiritualism had already been flourishing in the western half of New York state, where Tubman settled after the Civil War. Many abolitionists embraced this trend, and it may

have had some effect on the positive acceptance of Tubman's story in these circles, if not among her biographers.⁴⁵ Soon, the world of science and technology would provide new metaphors that eventually helped frame things like prophetic dreams and visions in a less spiritual or religious way. Drawing on the recent innovation of the telegraph, English classicist Frederic W. H. Myers coined the term "telepathy" in 1882 as a theory to explain what we would now call psychic or ESP experiences, including the kinds of premonitory visions and dreams that various friends and biographers of Tubman described. But the ideas and findings of nascent psychical research don't seem to have influenced Tubman's biographers any more than Spiritualism did.

The sort of somatic, "heart-fluttering" warnings Tubman reported...are also a common feature, anecdotally, in the lives of psychics; the military is even known to have funded research on "Spidey sense."

In the 20th century, mainstream academic or scientific culture continued to marginalize psychical research, even after J. B. Rhine and Louisa Rhine introduced more rigorous scientific methods in studying ESP at Duke University in the 1930s. The persistent gap between the robust support for ESP generated by parapsychologists and skepticism by mainstream scientists is well-known. The same skepticism—or really, ignorance of the whole topic—pervades the humanities as well. Thus it is unsurprising that modern historians have mostly failed to even consider Tubman's experiences as ESP evidence.

The problem is compounded by Tubman's status as a progressive icon. After Bradford, the next person to write a major biography on Tubman was a leftist journalist named Earl Conrad, who went to great lengths to minimize the spiritual and supernatural dimension of Tubman's story. Conrad was keen to portray Tubman as an effective radical and a revolutionary—perhaps the greatest-ever American hero—but his Marxist materialist worldview could not assimilate her mysticism. When he was researching her life in the 1930s, he wrote to psychiatric hospitals for insight, describing her narcolepsy, hallucinations, talking to God, and belief in prophetic dreams and

omens (noting that she was regarded by those who knew her as "touched in the head"). He received replies from physicians who variously attributed these things to her traumatic experiences as a slave, to hysteria, and to the head injury.⁴⁶ Since there was no consensus of professional medical opinion, he ultimately left the matter of his subject's visionary experiences out of his 1943 biography, *Harriet Tubman*.⁴⁷

Alice Brickler, a daughter of one of Tubman's nieces, conducted a cordial but disputatious correspondence with Conrad about this aspect of her great aunt while he was researching his book. Conrad had asserted in a letter that Tubman's visions and dreams were "by no means the most important thing" about her, but Brickler forcefully countered that her religious life should not be omitted:

I may be wrong but I believe that every age, every country and every race, especially during the darkest history, has had its unusual Souls who were in touch with some mysterious central originating Force, a comprehensive stupendous Unity for which we have no adequate name. Aunt Harriet was one of those unusual souls. Her religion, her dreams or visions were so bond together that nobody, and I certainly should not attempt it, could separate them.⁴⁸

Although not religious herself, Brickler added that as "a member of an oppressed race" her Aunt Harriet needed "the inspiration of the mystic as well as sagacity," and that "It was her dreams which saved her life often...and it was her superhuman courage and beliefs which gave her the power to accomplish what she had undertaken."⁴⁹ Conrad, who could not imagine a religious worldview that was not an opium of the masses, was not to be swayed. He replied to Brickler that "God is a piece of heavy artillery, employed by the rich to keep the poor content, satisfied, unrebelling, unmoving."⁵⁰ And that was that.

A neurobiological explanation for Tubman's experiences has served as an escape hatch for other biographers. In her comprehensive and otherwise excellent 2003 biography, *Bound for the Promised Land*, Larson attributed Tubman's sleeping spells, visions, and religiosity to temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE), a neurological disorder first described in the mid-1970s (originally as Geschwind Syndrome).⁵¹ Powerful religious visions, disembodied voices, alternating hyperactivity and fatigue, out-of-body experiences, and trance states are famous symptoms of this condition, and they sometimes arise after severe head injury.

Given how closely Tubman's behavior matches TLE symptomatology, it is certainly plausible that she had it. But we must be careful: Neuroscience is often used as a cudgel against paranormal claims. Any diagnosis of brain injury or disease tends to carry the implication that, whatever the individual's own convictions, their experiences are not "real." In writings on dream research, one will often see some version of the trope: "dreams were once thought to carry omens of the future, but then science showed that they could be explained as phenomena of the brain." The both-and possibility (which I make a case for in my work⁵²) remains unconsidered. To acknowledge

that Tubman may have had TLE, in other words, says nothing about the possible veridicality of the dreams and visions that her condition might have produced or facilitated.

Also, people can be religious and believe in their dreams and visions without TLE. Those things were very much features of Black culture at the time, and after. As Sernett writes, “What Conrad missed and Bradford sought to domesticate belongs to the prophetic and visionary strand within African American religion sometimes associated with the belief that certain individuals are born with unusual seer-like powers.”⁵³ But the fact that a folkloric belief in psychic phenomena was part of Tubman’s cultural milieu again lets biographers wash their hands of the precognitive claims—they can chalk it up to her (implicitly superstitious) “non-white religious self.” Once more, there’s a both-and that falls through the cracks. Abundant robust evidence suggests that, on the subject of what we can loosely call prophecy, folklore—including African religious beliefs—is far closer to the reality than mainstream scientific psychology currently is.

Super + Natural

Decades of findings from multiple laboratories now support precognition in various forms. A famous meta-analysis of forced-choice (Zener-card) precognition experiments conducted over several decades revealed astronomically high support for precognition.⁵⁴ Using remote viewing-type tasks, researchers at Princeton’s PEAR lab gathered significant evidence that participants can draw or describe targets that haven’t been selected yet with greater-than-chance accuracy.⁵⁵ Predictive physiological responses, or “presponses,” to stimuli have garnered considerable research attention since pioneering studies by Dean Radin in the mid-1990s, and meta-analyses of this body of research also show overwhelming statistical support.⁵⁶ The sort of somatic, “heart-fluttering” warnings Tubman reported to Sanborn are also a common feature, anecdotally, in the lives of psychics; the military is even known to have funded research on “Spidey sense.”⁵⁷ And there is growing evidence for behavioral presponses as well: Findings from Cornell psychologist Daryl Bem’s famous “Feeling the Future” series of experiments published in 2011 have been replicated by multiple labs.⁵⁸

Precognition/presentiment often anecdotally manifests as auditory “hallucination.” A psychic and ESP researcher in the mid-20th century, Rosalind Heywood, reported receiving what she called “orders” from a disembodied voice that only made sense in light of information she would learn later, typically after following the voice’s strange instructions.⁵⁹ One of the most famous living psychics, the remote viewer Joe McMoneagle, reported an inner voice guiding him away from danger during his time in Vietnam.⁶⁰ Trance medium Jess Taylor describes receiving “telepathic” instruction as though via an earphone that discretely directs her to places where she will find a person in need of aid and then instruction in how to provide that aid—information that, she claims, proves accurate.⁶¹

Proneness to out-of-body experiences is another commonly reported characteristic of psychics, both those with a natural

untrained ability and those who have been trained in modern methods like remote viewing. Three of the most studied and storied psychics of the famous Star Gate psychic spying program and the research at Stanford Research Institute that led to it—McMoneagle, Ingo Swann, and Pat Price—reported a facility with traveling out of body; Swann and Price, who developed this ability as part of their Scientology training, both reported obtaining psychic information in such a state.⁶² An argument can be made (controversially) that what seem like “out of body” experiences are really vivid or video-quality previews of in-body experiences later during waking life.⁶³

The “charm” attributed to Tubman is a familiar part of battlefield folklore, going by different names. Some charismatic individuals seem magically protected from danger and emanate a kind of calming authority. Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall) in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* is a fictitious version of this archetype, but a real one might be the Australian photographer and explorer Sir George Hubert Wilkins. During World War I, Wilkins was seen striding fearlessly across battlefields with his camera, bullets whizzing by him or harmlessly bouncing off his coat. He felt protected by a supernatural or supernormal force. Like Tubman, he described what we would now call extrasensory presentiments and warnings—a sort of Spidey sense, which baffled and inspired his companions and later saw him through numerous perils as a polar explorer.⁶⁴

Precognitive dreams are the most common paranormal experience, reported by a large percentage of the population and accepted as a normal feature of dreaming by most non-Western cultures, including African cultures like the Asante that influenced slave folklore and beliefs.⁶⁵ As is quite typical for those who report such dreams, Tubman’s dreams sometimes related to events that were soon to be reported in the news or that she would soon be told of, even if they had already happened. These kinds of uncanny yet “random” and often news-associated dreams are sometimes called “Dunne dreams,” after the precognitive dreamwork pioneer J. W. Dunne, whose 1927 book *An Experiment with Time* is one of the most important books ever written on the subject.⁶⁶ Dreams are notoriously hard to study scientifically, however, and this is doubly the case for precognitive dreams. They typically occur spontaneously, and with limited exceptions, experiencers typically aren’t aware of having had a precognitive dream until the precognized event comes to pass. Skeptics thus dismiss precognitive dream reports as hindsight memory distortion; yet when dreamers do carefully record and date their dreams, the records can frequently be shown to match later events and learning experiences, just as Dunne claimed. As I and a growing number of researchers in this field have shown, there is more than ample evidence that dream precognition not only is real but in fact is common. I argue it is basic to dreaming’s function.⁶⁷

A detail of Tubman’s life that is consistent with the biographies of some psychics is the head injury she received in her early teens. The only Tubman biographer to take the psychic claims seriously, James A. McGowan, argued that it was this event that activated her abilities, noting that some contemporary psychics similarly attributed their powers to head injuries—Dutch psychic Peter Hurkos being a famous example.⁶⁸

Other physical traumas like lightning strikes or fevers, as well as psychological traumas including histories of abuse, are also common in the biographies of psychics and experiencers of the paranormal, as they are, notably, in spiritual workers like shamans throughout the world.⁶⁹

Some writers have talked about physical as well as psychological trauma as “unlocking” (or in Whitley Strieber’s phrase, “cracking open”⁷⁰) supernormal capacities and perceptions. It is an intuitively compelling metaphor, but it may be possible to specify some more precise psychological mechanisms—most notably, dissociation. Out-of-body experiences may be triggered as a way of escaping traumas when they are occurring. With repeated traumatic experience, that dissociation can become habitual or second nature. Unsurprisingly, out-of-body “flights to freedom” were a common slave experience;⁷¹ this is easily attributed, reductively, to cultural tradition and, implicitly at least, a kind of Freudian wish-fulfillment, but trauma must be considered as a factor.⁷² Anecdotally at least, trauma-induced dissociative experiences may contain veridical precognitive information similar to that available in dreams.⁷³

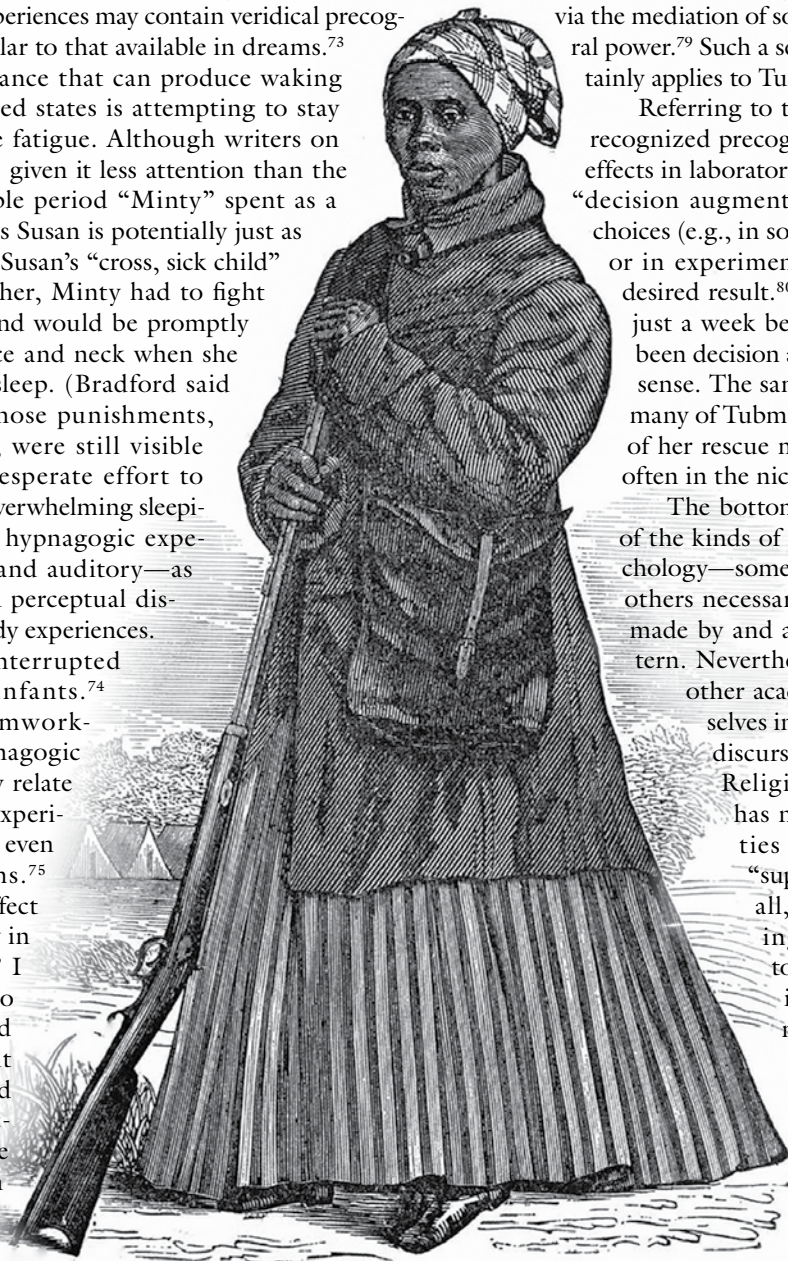
Another circumstance that can produce waking and semi-waking altered states is attempting to stay awake despite extreme fatigue. Although writers on Tubman’s dreams have given it less attention than the head injury, the terrible period “Minty” spent as a nurse for the cruel Miss Susan is potentially just as relevant. To keep Miss Susan’s “cross, sick child” from rousing her mother, Minty had to fight to remain conscious and would be promptly whipped about the face and neck when she (inevitably) did fall asleep. (Bradford said that the scars from those punishments, like the head wound, were still visible decades later.) The desperate effort to remain awake despite overwhelming sleepiness readily generates hypnagogic experiences—both visual and auditory—as well as more profound perceptual distortions and out-of-body experiences. So does constantly interrupted sleep from tending infants.⁷⁴ What is more, dreamworkers may find that hypnagogic images and voices may relate to later or imminent experiences as much or more even than standard dreams.⁷⁵ Whatever the added effect of the later head injury in inducing her “sleeps,” I think it is important to consider that 8-year-old Araminta Ross’s stint with Miss Susan could have been what effectively “trained” the future Harriet Tubman

in accessing, abiding in, and perhaps attending to these potentially precognogenic liminal-dream states.⁷⁶

I also consider Tubman’s famous prayer for the death of her master Edward Brodess to be an item potentially added to the list of evidence for her specifically precognitive (and not generalized “psi”) abilities. She told Bradford that she had regularly prayed for Brodess to repent of his wickedness, but that upon hearing plans to sell her and her siblings away, she changed her prayer: “First of March I began to pray, ‘Oh, Lord, if you aren’t ever going to change that man’s heart, kill him, Lord, and take him out of the way.’”⁷⁷ Brodess died just over a week later, on March 9, 1849. Parapsychologists interested in PK and the “power of prayer” will certainly disagree here, but I’ve argued elsewhere that conscious intentions or decisions, especially of highly intuitive people, may be precognition misrecognized.⁷⁸ Individuals with a strong and perhaps overdeveloped sense of self-efficacy—sometimes called “internal locus of control”—may overinterpret their own intentions as directly causative over events or causative via the mediation of some reliably compliant supernatural power.⁷⁹ Such a sense of self-efficacy (via God) certainly applies to Tubman.

Referring to the role of unrecognized or misrecognized precognition in producing expectation effects in laboratory research, Edwin May describes “decision augmentation”: precognitively making choices (e.g., in sorting of test and control subjects or in experiment timing) that will lead to the desired result.⁸⁰ Tubman’s change of her prayer just a week before Brodess’s death could have been decision augmentation in more or less this sense. The same framing potentially applies to many of Tubman’s decisions, such as the timing of her rescue missions that (she claimed) came often in the nick of time.

The bottom line: For those with awareness of the kinds of phenomena reported in parapsychology—some with strong laboratory support, others necessarily more anecdotal—the claims made by and about Tubman fit a familiar pattern. Nevertheless, with Conrad, Larson, and other academic biographers, we find ourselves in the typically ossified and brittle discursive universe that Rice University Religion Historian Jeffrey J. Kripal has noted characterizes the humanities around the most remarkable, “super” human experiences. First of all, there is an inability or unwillingness to confront challenging topics by “making the cut”—that is, to separate ostensible paranormal experiences from supernatural explanations given them by experiencers themselves and, as in this case, their biographers.⁸¹ We need not see any account of Tubman’s dreams and visions



and answered prayers as a “biography of the Supreme Being,” as Conrad reductively and obstinately put it in his correspondence with Brickler.⁸² Humez’s remark that God was Tubman’s word for the visionary source of her antislavery action is what we need to bear in mind. It is perfectly possible to set aside or bracket the question of who was talking to Tubman—God, her own future self, or something else entirely—while acknowledging both the importance of those inner dialogues to her life and achievements and, more to the point, the possible veridicality of the information that inner voice provided. Her experiences could be both “super” and “natural,” in other words.⁸³

Toward a Multidimensional Harriet Tubman

This year is (probably) the bicentennial of the birth of Araminta Ross in a Maryland slave cabin. At this historical distance, a complete and clear picture of the woman she became is difficult to assemble, and likely we will never have it. Her slave-liberating actions before the Civil War and her military missions during it were conducted with great secrecy; and because she could not write her own story, we are forced to extract it from the written narratives of others—individuals who, however well-meaning, had their own distinct biases. Tubman was biased too. Humez stresses that even if she could not write, she was an active shaper of her own narrative via those abolitionist and suffragist allies helping her tell it. Consequently, Harriet Tubman remains an ambiguous figure, with many seemingly hard-to-integrate facets, a kind of Rorschach blot for later writers.

I am sensitive to the fact that, outside the narrow confines of discourses of the paranormal and parapsychology, psychic experiences are sometimes used to invalidate those who express or believe in them as being naïve or uncritical. So, is “Harriet Tubman, Precog” ready for prime time? Only if, in telling this part of her story, we do not lose sight of the other, equally important and timely Harriet Tubman stories, of which there are a growing number. “Harriet Tubman, Astronomer” is one of them. Her name has recently been put forward to replace that of the homophobic NASA administrator James Webb for the lately deployed deep-space telescope, as she famously used her knowledge of the stars to tell time and guide her in her flight to freedom; she was also a witness to one of the most spectacular meteor showers ever recorded, in 1833.⁸⁴

“Harriet Tubman, Amazon,” is another important story being (re)told. A rousing 2015 “re-biography” by feminist historian Butch Lee attempts to restore Tubman’s political acuity and revolutionary militancy that somehow get lost in most of the books about her life. Long before the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter, Tubman was helping current and former slaves wage a successful war on slavery; she wasn’t just rescuing people on some humanitarian Red Cross mission. And like Conrad before her, Lee leaves the dreams and talking-to-God completely unmentioned. The reasons are obvious: Lee asserts that most white-written histories make Tubman out to be an anomaly, something exceptional and superhuman, which ultimately minimizes her political thoughtfulness, her military prowess, and her professionalism—qualities shared by many equally

committed Black people of that era. Lee is right. Somehow, the hard-as-nails, coarse-mouthed guerrilla, who would threaten hesitant fugitives with a gun to their head, saying “Go on or die,” magically transforms in some biographers’ and artists’ eyes into a nonviolent do-gooder, a Florence Nightingale-type and a “visionary.” I admit that I too succumbed to this beguilement when I first began researching Tubman a few years ago, tending to just skip over the violent, darker stuff, in search of that nurturing, superhuman rescuer and dreamer.

Bradford’s well-intentioned and still widely read biographies, especially the sanitized 1886 *Harriet: The Moses of Her People*—written at Tubman’s request, to provide needed revenue or her boarding of poor Blacks in Auburn—unfortunately perpetuate this one-sided, charity-working view of Tubman. Calculated to appeal to white readers in a wounded nation still trying to heal from the North-South divide, Bradford minimized the horrors of Tubman’s slave experiences and softened the rougher edges of her personality.⁸⁵ And by using dialect (“de” instead of “the,” etc., when quoting her), the effect was to compromise her subject’s dignity and intelligence. The ironic result is that Tubman’s favorite disguise—the harmless, possibly touched-in-the-head, God-praising old Black woman—still exerts its effect on many white Americans more than a century and a half later.

All of which is to say that the psychic Harriet Tubman, with visions and dreams and conversations with a higher power, must remain properly framed in the context of Tubman the freedom fighter, Tubman the activist, Tubman the suffragist, and yes, Tubman the Amazon. Somehow integrating all these sides of her would create a more multidimensional picture than any of those yet written: of a Black woman who contributed in significant ways to the most important social struggles of her time *and* (not “yet”) whose intuitive or psychic abilities played an important role in those efforts. That she was some kind of psychic superspy scanning the paths ahead with nonlocal consciousness is perhaps debatable. (I think that appealing picture is debatable with Cold War psychic spies too.⁸⁶) But that she exercised precognitive intuition throughout her life and work, and that her open communication with the divine gave her an aura that galvanized and strengthened herself and others during adversity, seem hard to question. In fact, that supernatural-seeming charm may, in the end, be the most crucial part of the psychic picture I have tried to paint. The fact that Tubman’s story has reminded so many people of Joan of Arc is no counterargument to it. If anything, it should prompt us to make the cut and consider the both-and possibility: that prophetic dreams and the charm that comes from a divine mandate could be a real pattern in the lives of charismatic freedom fighters, whenever and wherever they appear. Super and natural.

If I seduced you at the beginning of this article with the visionary Tubman and her nice dream foretelling Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, I would leave readers with another image that seems to encapsulate not only her commando skills but, at the same time, her immense humor and her charm (in its more mundane sense). Alice Brickler recalled a childhood visit with her mother to the elderly Tubman’s Auburn home:

[Aunt Harriet] and Mother were talking as they sat in the yard. Tiring of their conversation, I wandered off in the tall grasses to pick wild flowers. Suddenly I became aware of something moving toward me through the grass. So smoothly did it glide and with so little noise, I was frightened! Then reason conquered fear and I knew it was Aunt Harriet, flat on her stomach and with only the use of her arms and serpentine movements of her body, gliding smoothly along. Mother helped her back to her chair and they laughed. Aunt Harriet then told me that that was the way she had gone by many a sentinel during the war.⁸⁷

Acknowledgments

This article is based on a presentation given in December 2021 at the first Black Superhumanism symposium at Esalen's Center for Theory and Research. I thank the organizers, Dr. Stephen Finley and Dr. Biko Mandela Gray, for inviting me and for giving me the opportunity to present my still-forming thoughts on Tubman. I also thank the seminar participants for extremely valuable feedback and discussion, which contributed greatly to this article.

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Laura Kwerfel

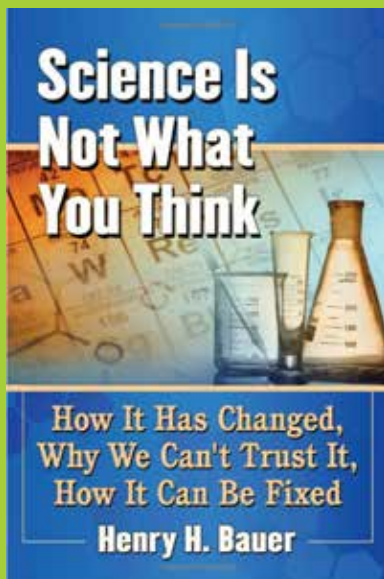
ENDNOTES

- 1 It was the convention in the 19th century to quote Black voices in dialect—"de" instead "the," "dere" instead of "there," etc. Throughout this article, I am removing the dialect in direct quotes related by Tubman's early biographers, such as this vignette recounted in Sarah H. Bradford's 1886 book *Harriet: The Moses of Her People*.
- 2 Humez, Jean M. (2003). *Harriet Tubman: The Life and Life Stories*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- 3 An invaluable guide to the uncertain and sometimes contradictory landscape of Tubman historiography is Milton C. Sernett's 2007 *Harriet Tubman: Myth, Memory, and History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- 4 Unless otherwise noted, I'm taking Tubman's biographical details from Kate Clifford Larson's comprehensive 2003 biography, *Bound for the Promised Land* (New York: Random House). Other sources have put her birth in 1820.
- 5 Bradford, Sarah H. (2018[1869]). *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*. [np].
- 6 In Harriet's absence, John Tubman married another woman. Although it has often been portrayed as a painful blow to Harriet when she returned for John and found him remarried, she used the opportunity to rescue several other slaves, and later in life, she recounted this episode, and John's unfaithfulness, with much amusement.
- 7 Sernett (2007) argues that the evidence points to 9 trips and from 60 to 80 people liberated. Humez (2003) arrives at 11 or 12 trips and 66–77 people liberated.
- 8 Lee, Butch. (2015.) "The Re-Biography of Harriet Tubman." In *Jailbreak Out of History*. Montreal, Canada: Kersplebedeb Publishing.
- 9 Sernett (2007) disputes the appellation "General" often given to Tubman as a result of her Civil War exploits, noting that Tubman herself acknowledged in a letter that Montgomery actually led the raid, even if she did the advance intelligence work and planning.
- 10 Bradford, 1869.
- 11 Sanborn's 1883 *Commonwealth* article, partly reproduced In Bradford, 1869, 39.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., 40.
- 16 Sernett, 2007.
- 17 Bradford, 1869, 28.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 In Bradford, 1869, 26.
- 20 Ibid. This story was embellished, as well as conflated with what was probably a separate mission, the rescue of Josiah Bailey, in Ann Petry's 1955 young-adult biography, *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers). Popular dreamwork teacher Robert Moss, drawing on Petry's account of Tubman's precognitive dreams in his 2000 book *Dreaming True* (New York: Pocket Books), reproduced Petry's inaccuracies, for instance saying that Tubman's guidance in this instance came in a dream during one of her "sleeps." The guidance in this case came in a waking state. Petry also writes that the fugitives returned to the shore of the river where they had first crossed and found trampled grass and cigar butts indicating that the search party had been there, an embellishment of Garrett's detail about the posted reward at a nearby train station.
- 21 Bradford, 1886.
- 22 Bradford, 1869, 29
- 23 Bradford, 1869, 29–31
- 24 In Sernett, 2007, 134
- 25 In Sernett, 2007, 134
- 26 In Bradford, 1869, 26.
- 27 In Bradford, 1869, 26–7.
- 28 Bradford, 1869, 27.
- 29 Bradford, 1869, 50 (italics in original).
- 30 Bradford, Sarah H. (1901). *Harriet: The Moses of Her People*, revised edition; <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/9999/old/8htub10.txt>

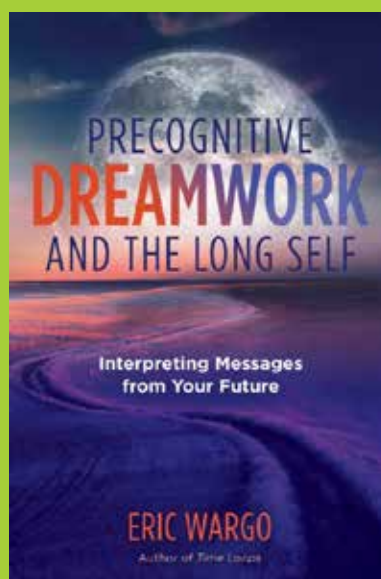
- 31 The day after the meeting, Brown wrote to one of his sons of Tubman, “He is most of a man that I ever met with” (Larson, 2003, 157–8). In Brown’s eyes, Tubman’s leadership qualities earned her the masculine pronoun.
- 32 Bradford, 1869, 40–41.
- 33 Bradford, 1869, 41.
- 34 Larson, 2003. Butch Lee (2015, 57) writes: “The plain truth was that Harriet wasn’t spending her life waiting around for white men to get it together. She had her own guerrilla work, her own political agenda, and she was pursuing those while the dedicated but disorganized John Brown was figuring out what to do.”
- 35 Larson, 2003, 262.
- 36 Bradford, 1901.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Larson, 2003.
- 39 See Moss, 2000; a 2019 YouTube video, “Harriet Tubman—Psychic, Seer” by ThinkAnomalous also summarizes Tubman’s life and psychic claims: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkEWBA9yYDw>
- 40 Sernett, 2007, 134.
- 41 Chireau, Yvonne P. (2003). *Black Magic*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Shafton, Anthony. (2002). *Dream-Singers*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- 42 Humez, Jean M. (1996). “In Search of Harriet Tubman’s Spiritual Autobiography.” In Judith Weisenfeld, Richard Newman, Eds., *This Far by Faith*. London: Routledge, 252.
- 43 Sernett, 2007.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Conrad, Earl. (1943.) *Harriet Tubman*. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers.
- 48 In Sernett, 2007, 142.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 In Sernett, 2007, 143.
- 51 Larson, 2003.
- 52 Wargo, Eric. (2018). *Time Loops*. Charlottesville, Virginia: Anomalist Books; Wargo, Eric. (2021). *Precognitive Dreamwork and the Long Self*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions.
- 53 Sernett, 2007, 144
- 54 Honorton, Charles; Ferrari, Diane C. (1989). “‘Future Telling’: A Meta-Analysis of Forced-Choice Precognition Experiments, 1935–1987.” *Journal of Parapsychology* 53:281–308.
- 55 Dunne, Brenda J.; Jahn, Robert G. (2003). “Information and Uncertainty in Remote Perception Research.” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 17:207–241.
- 56 Mossbridge, Julia; Tressoldi, Patrizio; Utts, Jessica. (2012). “Predictive Physiological Anticipation Preceding Seemingly Unpredictable Stimuli: A Meta-Analysis.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 3(390):1-18. Radin, Dean I. (1997). “Unconscious Perception of Future Emotions: An Experiment in Presentiment.” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 11:163–180.
- 57 Beidel, Eric. (2014, March 27). “More than a Feeling: ONR Investigates ‘Spidey Sense’ for Sailors and Marines (Media Release).” Arlington, VA: Office of Naval Research.
- 58 Bem, Daryl. (2011). “Feeling the Future: Experimental Evidence for Anomalous Retroactive Influences on Cognition and Affect.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100:407–425. Bem, Daryl; Tressoldi, Patrizio E., Rabeyron, Thomas; Duggan, Michael. (2015). “Feeling the Future: A Meta-Analysis of 90 Experiments on the Anomalous Anticipation of Random Future Events.” *F1000Research*. 2015;4:1188.
- 59 Heywood, Rosalind. (1964). *The Infinite Hive*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- 60 McMoneagle, Joseph. (2002). *The Stargate Chronicles*. Charlottesville, Virginia: Hampton Roads.
- 61 Taylor, Jess. (2020). *The Voice*. Author. Taylor attributes “the Voice” to a nonhuman intelligence (not God).
- 62 Wilhelm, John. (1976). *The Search for Superman*. New York: Pocket Books.
- 63 Wargo, 2021.
- 64 Nasht, Simon. (2005). *The Last Explorer*. New York: Arcade Publishing. Parapsychologists will know Wilkins as the “sender” in the interesting 1937 long-distance telepathy experiment with Harold Sherman, published as *Thoughts Through Space*.
- 65 Shafton, 2002.
- 66 Dunne, J. W. (1927). *An Experiment with Time*. London: Faber and Faber.
- 67 Wargo, 2021.
- 68 See McGowan, James A.; Kashatus, William C. (2011). *Harriet Tubman*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood.
- 69 One of the best-attested contemporary “precogs” (people with a high degree of precognitive ability) is a Houston woman named Elizabeth Krohn, whose precognitive dreams of air and other disasters followed being struck by lightning in 1988. Krohn, Elizabeth Greenfield; Kripal, Jeffrey J. (2018). *Changed in a Flash*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Press.
- 70 Strieber, Whitley; Kripal, Jeffrey J. (2016). *The Super Natural*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin.
- 71 Johnson, Clifton H., ed. (1969). *God Struck Me Dead*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock. Sobel, Mechal. (2000). *Teach Me Dreams*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- 72 As Sernett (2007) notes, the mythologization of Tubman’s story has had a way of occulting the reality that many other slaves escaped to freedom and served as conductors on the Underground Railroad; we just know way less about them. One wonders how often dreams may have played some role, as it did for Tubman.
- 73 The story of San Quentin prisoner Ed Morrell (basis of Jack London’s 1915 novel *The Star Rover*) is one example: Morrell claimed that while straightjacketed in solitary confinement, he traveled out of body and saw things he later confirmed—including health issues of other inmates and the new prison warden who would ultimately pardon him. Morrell, Ed. (1955). *The 25th Man*. New York: Vantage Press.

- 74 Hurd, R. (2014). "Unearthing the Paleolithic Mind in Lucid Dreams." In R. Hurd & K. Bulkeley (Eds.), *Lucid dreaming: New perspectives on consciousness in sleep*: (pp. 277–324). Westport, Connecticut: Praeger/ABC-CLIO. I myself experienced altered sleep states including sleep paralysis and lucid dreams, in some cases precognitive, in the first sleepless months caring for both of my children.
- 75 Wargo, 2021.
- 76 Bradford (1869, 10) even muses that "Perhaps [Miss Susan] was preparing her, though she did not know it then, by this enforced habit of wakefulness, for the many long nights of travel, when she was the leader and guide of the weary and hunted ones who were escaping from bondage." The biographer may be more right than she could have realized, even if wakefulness per se was not the only effect of this "preparation."
- 77 Bradford, 1869, 11.
- 78 Wargo, 2021.
- 79 "PK Man" Ted Owens would be an example, as at least some of Owens' claimed feats arguably fit a misrecognized precognition model. See Mishlove, Jeffrey. (2000). *PK Man*. Charlottesville, Virginia: Hampton Roads.
- 80 May, Edwin C. (2015). "Experimenter Psi: A View of Decision Augmentation Theory." In E.C. May & S.B. Marwaha (Eds.), *Extrasensory Perception Vol. 2*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger.
- 81 Strieber & Kripal, 2016.
- 82 In Sernett, 2007, 143.
- 83 Strieber & Kripal, 2016.
- 84 Larson, 2003; Prescod-Weinstein, Chanda. (2021). *The Disordered Cosmos*. New York: Bold Type Books.
- 85 Humez, 2003.
- 86 Wargo, Eric. (2020, June). "Pat Price, Precognition, and 'Star Wars,'" *EdgeScience*. <https://scientificexploration.s3.amazonaws.com/files/edgescience-42.pdf#page=10>
- 87 Humez, 2003, 137–8.

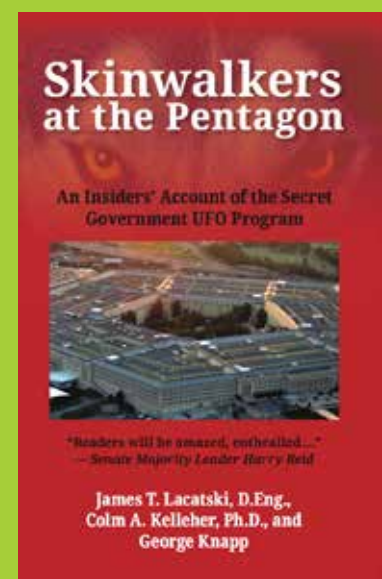
Noteworthy Books



Science Is Not What You Think—How It Has Changed, Why We Can't Trust It, How It Can Be Fixed
by Henry Bauer
McFarland, 2017



Precognitive Dreamwork and the Long Self: Interpreting Messages from Your Future
By Eric Wargo
Inner Traditions, 2021



Skinwalkers at the Pentagon: An Insiders' Account of the Secret Government UFO Program
by James Lacatski, Colm A. Kelleher, and George Knapp
RTMA, 2021

Colm A. Kelleher

The Pentagon's Secret UFO Program, the Hitchhiker Effect, and Models of Contagion

In September 2008 the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) initiated a \$22 million, two-year contract with Bigelow Aerospace Advanced Studies (BAASS) to scientifically study UFOs and their effects on humans. And so began one of the most controversial programs in the history of the United States Government. The program was named Advanced Aerospace Weapon System Applications Program (AAWSAP) and was kept secret from the public until *The New York Times* broke the story in December 2017 (Cooper, Blumenthal & Kean, 2017). DIA senior analyst James T. Lacatski was the primary creator of AAWSAP.

Within five months of the AAWSAP start date in 2008 a team of 50 PhD and Masters level scientists, technicians, engineers, analysts, military intelligence professionals, program managers, and security officers had been recruited, hired, and were being assigned security clearances. During the program's 24 months duration plus a three month no-cost extension, BAASS delivered over one hundred technical reports on different aspects of UFO performance, as well as reports describing medical, psychological, and physiological effects of UFOs and associated phenomena.

Skinwalker Ranch

One area of investigation initiated by AAWSAP involved the (in)famous Skinwalker Ranch where multiple UFO sightings had taken place over decades as well as a plethora of anomalies that included cattle mutilations, sightings of orbs of different colors, discarnate entities, and poltergeist activity (Kelleher and Knapp, 2005). Shortly after the AAWSAP investigations began, the DIA deployed several military personnel on site visits to Skinwalker Ranch to corroborate and evaluate earlier reports of anomalous phenomena. Lacatski himself had experienced a profound anomaly on the ranch in 2007; this experience, in fact, was a significant instigation for the formation of the AAWSAP/BAASS program.

All five DIA personnel deployed to the ranch experienced profound anomalies while on the property, and more importantly, all five "brought something home" with them. The leader of these five military personnel was a Naval Intelligence officer whom we gave the pseudonym Jonathan Axelrod in our book (Lacatski, Kelleher & Knapp, 2021). Axelrod was an accomplished engineer who would eventually be promoted to the rank of two-star admiral within Naval Intelligence and who possessed Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS SCI) clearances at the time of his ranch visit in July 2009.

Axelrod, accompanied by Jim Costigan and David Wilson, encountered an anomaly on the ranch that caused a lot of fear in all three men. But little did he know that this incident was only the beginning of his troubles. Within a month of arriving back home in Virginia, a plethora of paranormal phenomena suddenly erupted in Axelrod's home.

For several years following his July 2009 and subsequent trips to the Ranch, Axelrod's wife and teenage children were subjected to nightmarish "dogmen" appearing in their backyard; to blue, red, yellow, and white orbs routinely floating through the home and in the yard; to black shadow people standing over their beds when they awoke; and to a relentless barrage of loud, unexplained footsteps walking up and down the stairs of their house.

The Axelrod teenagers endured some very scary episodes in their bedrooms; Paul, the younger teenager, claims to have been attacked by blue and red orbs in his bedroom on the night of February 7, 2011. But they kept quiet about their strange experiences. So imagine Paul's shock when he was approached by one of his high school friends in 2011 who told him that on the previous night, he had looked out his bedroom window and had witnessed a large wolf-like creature standing outside his bedroom looking in at him. A few weeks later another friend told Paul of seeing strange blue lights flying around his backyard. These revelations by the two friends came without prompting from Paul. In other words, they cannot be dismissed as "me too" phenomena. The experiences by Paul's school friends suggests that the perception of bizarre creatures and blue orbs was *transferable* beyond the Axelrod family home and out into the neighborhood. It's unlikely that these events could be explained as a series of improbable coincidences. Likewise, since the Axelrod children were very reticent in discussing these experiences outside their immediate family, the incidents with their school friends cannot be dismissed as peer mimicry.

The Axelrod family also suffered health effects with the wife suffering flare-ups of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (Lupus) and Raynaud's Disease. Both Axelrod teenagers also endured intense flu-like symptoms at different times following anomalies in their home, with the most serious medical symptoms occurring in the younger teenager.

What was once a normal middle-class home in suburban Virginia became an inferno of unexplained phenomena. And Axelrod and his family were certain that the trigger for this transformation was his first trip to Skinwalker Ranch. Axelrod and his family can be considered the "poster children" for the eruption of anomalies in the home following trips to Skinwalker Ranch.

Health Effects

The Axelrods were far from alone. During the AAWSAP/BAASS program, the phenomenon of ranch visitors bringing something home with them became the rule rather than the exception. Even ranch owner and BAASS founder Robert Bigelow reported numerous anomalies and unusual activity in his home in the months and years after visiting Skinwalker Ranch. Journalist George Knapp made several visits to Skinwalker Ranch before and after the AAWSAP/BAASS investigations on Skinwalker Ranch, some lasting overnight. Subsequent to the trips, Knapp reported that his wife experienced multiple apparitions in their home, including sightings of blue orbs outside the window of their place in Las Vegas.

Jim Costigan, a Marine who had accompanied Axelrod on that first visit to the ranch, and his wife experienced a very close encounter with a blue orb in their quiet Maryland neighborhood in September 2009. Her upper arm was briefly grazed by a low flying blue orb as it flew past her and disappeared into the neighborhood. Almost immediately she became ill and experienced a constellation of unusual symptoms before being eventually diagnosed with Hashimoto's Thyroiditis, an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks the thyroid gland.

A number of other people who became "infected" at Skinwalker Ranch also began to experience autoimmune disease in one or more family or household members. These autoimmune diseases included Graves' Disease (thyroid), Sjogren's syndrome (salivary and tear glands), Hashimoto Thyroiditis (thyroid), Rheumatoid Arthritis (joints), and Lupus (heart, lung, muscle). Blood dyscrasias, connective tissue and dermatological abnormalities, including those of Systemic Sclerosis, were also diagnosed in this group of experiencers. It is important to note that all of the medical diagnoses were made by at least three MDs and all brain scans and other clinical findings were reviewed independently by more than one board-certified specialist physician.

George Knapp and I have separately interviewed more than 10 security officers who had spent two-week tours of duty on the ranch as a part of the AAWSAP/BAASS program, and each security officer confirmed that they had brought a paranormal infection from Skinwalker Ranch with them. The officers confirmed that they or their partners had experienced poltergeist and other paranormal activity in their homes following their tours on the ranch.

Lacatski himself and his wife experienced a few, but not many, anomalies in their home in the years following his Skinwalker Ranch experience. But DIA official Susanna Ash, who was hired at the Defense Warning Office in January 2011 and sat in the office cubicle at DIA next to Jim Lacatski between February and June 2011, reported that on the night of February 6, 2011, Eddie Ash, Susanna's brother who previously had no experience whatsoever with anomalies, had an escalating series of close encounters with UAPs in rural Mocksville, North Carolina, that continued for months afterwards. Eddie's quiet country home suddenly had large orange UAPs hovering outside at night. Aerial photos of his house were sent to his mobile phone from unknown numbers. And his pet dog once disappeared (through multiple locked doors) while Eddie slept, only to be found in the morning whimpering outside.

After Robert Bigelow sold the Skinwalker Ranch to Utah real estate mogul Brandon Fugal in April 2016, Fugal installed a multidisciplinary team of scientific talent and instrumentation on the property to continue the scientific investigations of the ranch anomalies. Brandon Fugal's team corroborated many of the anomalies experienced by AAWSAP and by National Institute for Discovery Science (NIDS) personnel. In 2020 the History Channel began airing TV documentary episodes entitled "The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch." Many anecdotal reports began emerging regarding individuals on Skinwalker Ranch "bringing something home" with them in the past few years.

The Hitchhiker Effect

This feeling of "bringing something home" and the subsequent person to person transmissibility of paranormal phenomena, some of which can last for years, has been named the Hitchhiker Effect. In an April 2022 interview, Skinwalker Ranch research team member Dr. Jim Segala addressed the Hitchhiker phenomenon: "Over the past five years, it has been our experience that when people interact with the phenomena and do not treat the phenomena with respect, that's when we see a higher rate of the Hitchhiker Syndrome. Symptoms experienced by people range from acute neurological injuries to chronic blood disease. Those who have told us that they have brought home a souvenir often have some type of illness as well as family members. The data again comes from years of tracking and collecting data from those who have come forward."

The deceptively tranquil appearance of Skinwalker Ranch (2008–2010). G. Knapp



(Sinclair, 2022) Segala's description mirrors many of the Hitchhiker symptoms experienced by victims and documented during the AAWSAP program and provides additional details on the medical sequelae of the Hitchhiker Effect.

But the Hitchhiker Effect is not unique to Skinwalker Ranch. The AAWSAP research team found that even close encounters with UFOs in locations unrelated to Skinwalker Ranch produced a version of the Hitchhiker Effect. This was not always the case but did occur especially when the experiencers were followed and regularly interviewed by the AAWSAP team over long periods of time.

For example, biotechnologist Ron Becker and his daughter were travelling outside Bend Oregon in May 2005 when his daughter noticed three blue-colored objects moving randomly in a field close to the highway. The objects quickly flew towards the vehicle, one went in front, one went through the car and flew across the dashboard, and the third entered Ron Becker's shoulder, maneuvered through his thoracic area and exited his shoulder as his horrified daughter watched. Ron Becker subsequently came down with a constellation of medical symptoms.

Becker's daughter, although shocked and disturbed by the incident, was not medically injured. When she returned to the home in Connecticut that she shared with her three college roommates, a paranormal frenzy seemed to erupt in the home with her friends waking up to find dark shadowy humanoid figures crouching over their beds and extensive poltergeist activity in the home, especially heavy footsteps traipsing up and down the stairs at night. Becker or her college friends had never experienced any activity in that home prior to her close encounter with the blue orbs.

Poltergeists and Contagion

Darren W. Ritson's recent thought-provoking book on poltergeists and contagion (Ritson, 2021) depicts evidence for a transmissibility phenomenon that occurred with the infamous South Shields, UK poltergeist case of 2006 and aftermath. The book described in great detail the disturbing effects of a poltergeist that "infested" a home in South Shields, a small village in northeast England during 2006 and 2007. Ritson and his colleague/co-investigator Michael Hallowell recounted many anomalous events, the majority of which overlapped with phenomena that had been reported on Skinwalker Ranch, including "windows opening and shutting repeatedly, appearances of anomalous black shapes, sounds of footsteps in the loft, banging and thumping noises in the bedrooms, people being pushed violently from behind, discarnate voices, objects being moved around."

Ritson goes on to describe "a process whereby the bizarre antics of the poltergeist spread outwards from the home of the principal witnesses and start to affect others around them; extended family members, friends, colleagues and investigators who choose, or accidentally wander into, the arena of metaphysical conflict. Like a communicable disease, the poltergeist phenomenon can attach itself to others." Ritson's words echo the experiences of the AAWSAP investigators on the Skinwalker Ranch in detail. Through delineating multiple

additional cases, Darren Ritson provides further evidence that poltergeist contagion is possibly quite common and underreported.

Previous Evidence of Transmissibility

In 1973, when noted illusionist and psychokinetic practitioner Uri Geller was undergoing a series of tests of his psychic abilities at the prestigious Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), a series of bizarre events began to unfold both in the lab itself and at the homes of the scientists who were conducting the studies. As with Skinwalker Ranch visitors, many of the researchers involved had the highest level of security clearances, including Special Access Program (SAP) clearances that necessitated polygraph testing as well as frequent personality evaluations.

Author Jim Schnabel, in his engaging history of American psychic spies (Schnabel, 1997), recounts the bizarre series of events that unfolded at the lab when scientists began to "measure" Uri Geller's alleged psychic abilities. Writes Schnabel: "Peter Crane and some of the others in the Livermore group quickly found themselves involved in more strangeness than they could handle. In the days and weeks that followed, they began to feel that they were collectively possessed by some kind of tormenting, teasing, hallucination-inducing spirit. They all would be in a laboratory together, setting up some experiment, or one of the fellows and his wife and children would be at home, just sitting around, when suddenly there in the middle of the room would be a weird, hovering, almost comically stereotypical image of a flying saucer... On the other hand, the flying saucer wasn't the only form the Livermore visions took. There were sometimes animals—fantastic animals from the ecstatic lore of shamans—such as the large raven-like birds that were seen traipsing through the yards of several members of the group. One of them appeared briefly to a physicist named Mike Russo and his terrified wife. The two were lying around one morning when suddenly there was this giant bird staring at them from the foot of their bed. After a few weeks of this, Russo and some of the others began seriously to wonder if they were losing their sanity." Other scientists and their families saw orbs and black shadowy forms in their homes.

There are some interesting overlaps between the events at Lawrence Livermore in 1973 and those that occurred at the Axelrod's residence and at the homes of other Skinwalker Ranch visitors some 37 years later. In both, the central "victims" were individuals with highest level clearances and are/were working in senior position levels in several government agencies. In both, an initial "psychic" trigger (Uri Geller to Livermore and Axelrod's or Costigan's visit to the ranch) plunged multiple people, and their families, into a netherworld where high strangeness events unfolded. In both, balls of light presented unexpectedly to family members. In both, bizarre, archetypal, mythological animals and birds manifested. In both, multiple poltergeist-like phenomena affected families. In both, the experiences appeared to be centered near bedrooms, hallways, and backyards of homes involved. In both, black rectangles (Axelrod, Witt) or black cubes (Livermore scientists)

were involved. Intriguingly, physicist Hal Puthoff was a central player in both the Lawrence Livermore and, as an AAWSAP BAASS consultant and contractor, in the Axelrod and other post Skinwalker Ranch incidents.

Infectious Agent Model

During 2020 and 2021 everyone in the world became familiar with the jargon of coronavirus infectious disease modelling. After thousands of newspaper, TV, and digital media reports detailed the first COVID-19 index cases in Washington state, Wuhan, California, and New York, the concept of an index case for an infectious disease became familiar to everyone. Just as the Wuhan Institute of Virology or the wet markets in China may have been the source of the COVID-19 outbreak, could Skinwalker Ranch be the source of an infectious agent of some kind?

The experiences of Axelrod and others have led me to consider an infectious disease model to try to shed some light on the phenomena, as they bore a striking resemblance to the transmission of an infectious agent between individuals. The “symptoms” of the “infection” comprised the eruption of poltergeist and other paranormal events in the immediate environment of the newly infected individual.

Utilizing this terminology, Axelrod was the index case who was first “infected” on Skinwalker Ranch and carried the infectious agent 2,000 miles home to Virginia with him. Within a few days or weeks, the agent had spread from Axelrod to his wife and both his teenage sons, and all three began experiencing a bewildering diversity of anomalies in their home. Within a few more weeks the infectious agent had spread to the neighborhood and infected two teenage friends, probably at school, who lived within a couple of miles of the Axelrod home. It should be noted that the symptoms of infection from Skinwalker Ranch are not respiratory distress or death, as with COVID-19, but rather profoundly altered perceptual environments.

In standard infectious disease parlance, the basic reproduction number (denoted by R_0) is a measure of how transmissible a disease is. It is the average number of people that a single infectious person will infect over the course of their infection. In the “Axelrod outbreak,” the basic reproduction number R_0 could be denoted as 3. Therefore, any study of the putative transmission of the Skinwalker Ranch infectious entity would be very amenable to standard infectious disease modeling. The tools of infectious disease modelling are well established.

It goes without saying that the number of people involved in these observations are too few to draw any firm conclusions, but the metaphor of an infectious disease could be a useful one for future research on the Hitchhiker Effect.

Obviously, in order to drill down into this infectious disease possibility, a much larger epidemiological modeling effort would have to be initiated, one in which every individual and their family members who spent time on Skinwalker Ranch could be followed closely and interviewed every few months over a several year period.

Social Contagion Model

An interesting paper by Ben Green, Thibaut Horel, and Andrew V. Papachristos published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2017 showed that gunshot violence follows an epidemic-like process of social contagion that is transmitted through networks of people by social interactions. The objective of the study was to evaluate the extent to which the people who will become subjects of gun violence in Chicago can be predicted by modeling gun violence as an epidemic that is transmitted between individuals through social interactions. According to the results, “social contagion” accounted for 63.1% of the 11,123 gunshot violence episodes in Chicago; subjects of gun violence were shot on average 125 days after contact with their “infectior,” the person most responsible for exposing the subject to gunshot violence. Some subjects of gun violence were shot more than once.

The authors write: “Our findings suggest that the diffusion of violence follows an epidemic-like process of social contagion that is transmitted through networks by social interactions.” In other words, the transmission of violence, although not an infectious entity, follows a predictable social contagion model that is amenable to analysis and, subsequently, to intervention.

Regardless of the epidemiological model utilized (infectious agent or social contagion), the central point is that the AAWSAP program on Skinwalker Ranch was the first to unmask a transmission-like phenomenon that was occurring in individuals who visited the ranch, and that this transmission is probably amenable to analysis utilizing standard infectious disease or social contagion modelling. Further, in some cases, the transmission into some households was correlated with the emergence of autoimmune disease in family members. Hence in these post-Skinwalker Ranch contagions, if social contagion is the appropriate modelling template, then social contagion in these cases has biological consequences.

Other Models of Social Contagion

A number of authors have sought to develop or challenge the simple network model of social contagion. Those seeking to develop this model have suggested that a more satisfying model of contagious social behavior requires a more layered account of the nature of social contact (Thompson, T., Personal Communication). Harvard University’s Damon Centola and Cornell University’s Michael Macy (2007) distinguished between “simple” and “complex” social contagions, arguing that the latter requires contact with more than one infected carrier.

British mathematician Iacopo Iacopini and colleagues developed a model that combines stochastic processes of simple contagion and of complex contagion occurring through group interactions in which an individual is simultaneously exposed to multiple sources of contagion (Iacopini et al., 2019). These authors created simulations from contact data from four separate real-world situations: a workplace, a conference, a hospital, and a high school. These higher order interactions of social contagion might eventually be applied to model data from hitchhiker attachments.

Future Research

Following the June 25, 2021, announcement by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) that UFOs are real and may constitute an air safety threat and even a national security problem, much public interest has been focused on what a future program investigating both UFO performance and UFO effects on human beings might look like. During such a study, if additional examples of a Hitchhiker Effect were discovered, several paths for future research could be explored.

An epidemiological infectious agent model could be adopted. Provided the number of cases was sufficiently large in a new study, formally measuring the basic reproduction number (R_0) of the hitchhiker “infections” would be feasible. Such a study could utilize some of the most useful epidemiological parameters defined for COVID (Gallo et al 2020). For example, measurement of time between infection and onset of symptoms (aka incubation period) will be possible. The definition of the contagion’s transmissibility period, the time during which an infected person transmits the infectious entity to other people, would also be achievable. Definition of any illnesses in families, school friends, or neighbors associated with hitchhiker transference would add to the research picture of the transmissibility phenomenon.

The links between biological and social contagion could be explored. Social contagion is similar to biological contagion—both spread through a replication process that is heedless of the consequences for the individual, and if each person transmits to more than one person, the rapid pace of exponential growth creates an epidemic (Bauch and Galvani, 2013). In the Skinwalker Ranch cases cited above, the development of autoimmune disease in several of the families suffering the Hitchhiker Effect was observed by AAWSAP researchers. Whether autoimmune disease development in these families was caused by “hitchhikers” is unknown, although links between stress-related disorders and autoimmune disease are well known (Song et al. 2018).

Future research could also allow us to test various hypotheses on the mechanism involved in the Hitchhiker Effect. The common denominator with people who experience the effects of bringing something home is not respiratory distress, hemorrhagic fever, or other symptoms of viral infection. Alterations in a person’s perceptual environment appears to be the most common manifestation. Symptoms include waking up with black shadow humanoids standing over their beds; various types of poltergeist activity; colored orbs flying through people’s bedrooms and homes at night; apparitions of dead children or adults; unexplained loud noises around the house; and much more.

The Role of Consciousness

Alterations in human perception as a result of being “infected” suggest that some of the new models of human consciousness proposed by luminaries such as philosopher-computer scientist Bernardo Kastrup (Kastrup 2019), University of California Irvine professor Donald Hoffman (Hoffman, 2020), Rice

University professor Jeffrey Kripal (Kripal, 2019), microchip inventor Federico Faggin (Faggin, 2021), University of Virginia professor Edward Kelly (Kelly et al 2015), and stem cell biologist Robert Lanza (Lanza et al. 2020) may be relevant. The proposal that consciousness is “prime” and actually undergirds physical reality and is not emergent from neurochemical trafficking in the brain is fundamental to this new viewpoint.

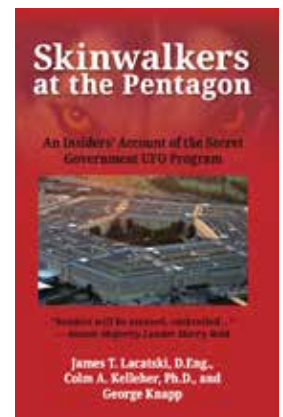
One implication of the new perspective on human consciousness is that the brain may act as a “filter” of consciousness, as proposed by Aldous Huxley (Huxley, 1954). Bernardo Kastrup emphasizes that psychedelics decrease brain activity while the individual paradoxically undergoes extremely intense perceptual activity (Kastrup, 2021). He writes: “...in all cases, the physiological effect of the psychedelic is to reduce brain activity, particularly in the so-called ‘default mode network,’ which is correlated with our ego or sense of individual identity. The phenomenological effect, on the other hand, is one of the richest and most intense experiences a human being can possibly have. If one’s brain is effectively going to sleep during those experiences, where are the experiences then coming from?” Kastrup’s question is a good one, and measurable brain alterations, including quiescence, may be one investigative readout for looking at Hitchhiker Effects on the human brain as a part of a future UFO program.

Once the hitchhiker “attaches” to or infects a new victim, can it play a role in manipulating or inhibiting the normal mode of the brain in filtering out reality in much the same way as psychedelics allegedly reduce the brain’s screening capability? (Luke, 2022; Swanson, 2018)

In a future research program, assuming a sufficiently large number of cases with adequate statistical power, researchers could test and measure the effects of a hitchhiker infection on victims. The brain imaging studies on experiencers and family members conducted as a part of the AAWSAP 2008-2010 program could be significantly expanded to specifically test whether experiencers and family members showed unusual brain activity or structure when compared to controls. Issues of looking at brain biomarkers have been ongoing, and a number of papers have already been submitted for peer reviewed publication (Green, C.C., Personal communication).

The Pentagon’s secret AAWSAP program pioneered a dual track approach of investigating UFO performance and technical characteristics while simultaneously researching effects of UFOs on humans and thus successfully created a new innovative template for future US Government UFO programs. Whether this template is capable of being utilized again remains to be seen.

This excerpt is adapted and expanded from *Skinwalkers at the Pentagon: An Insiders’ Account of the Secret Government UFO Program* by James Lacatski, Colm A. Kelleher, and George Knapp, 2021, (Henderson, NV: RTMA).



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