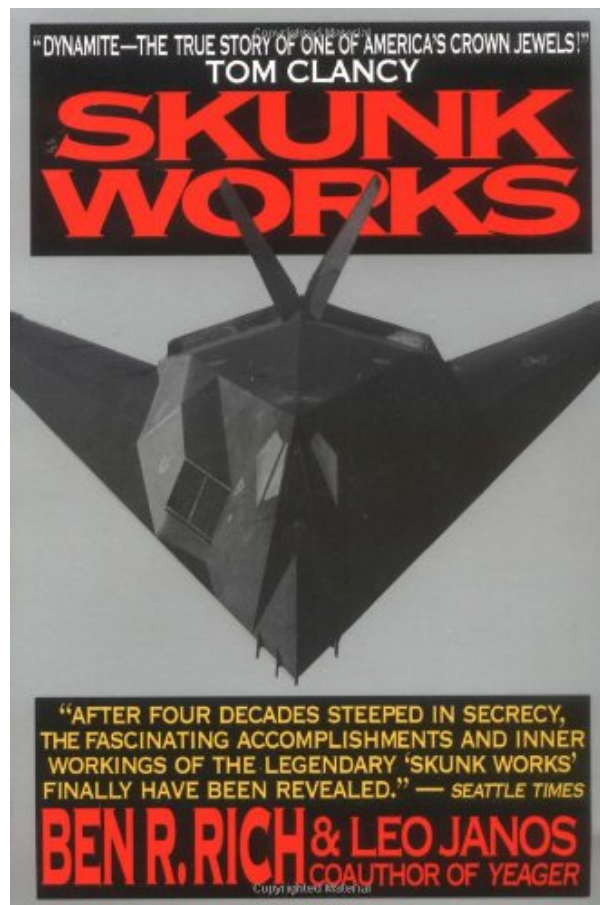
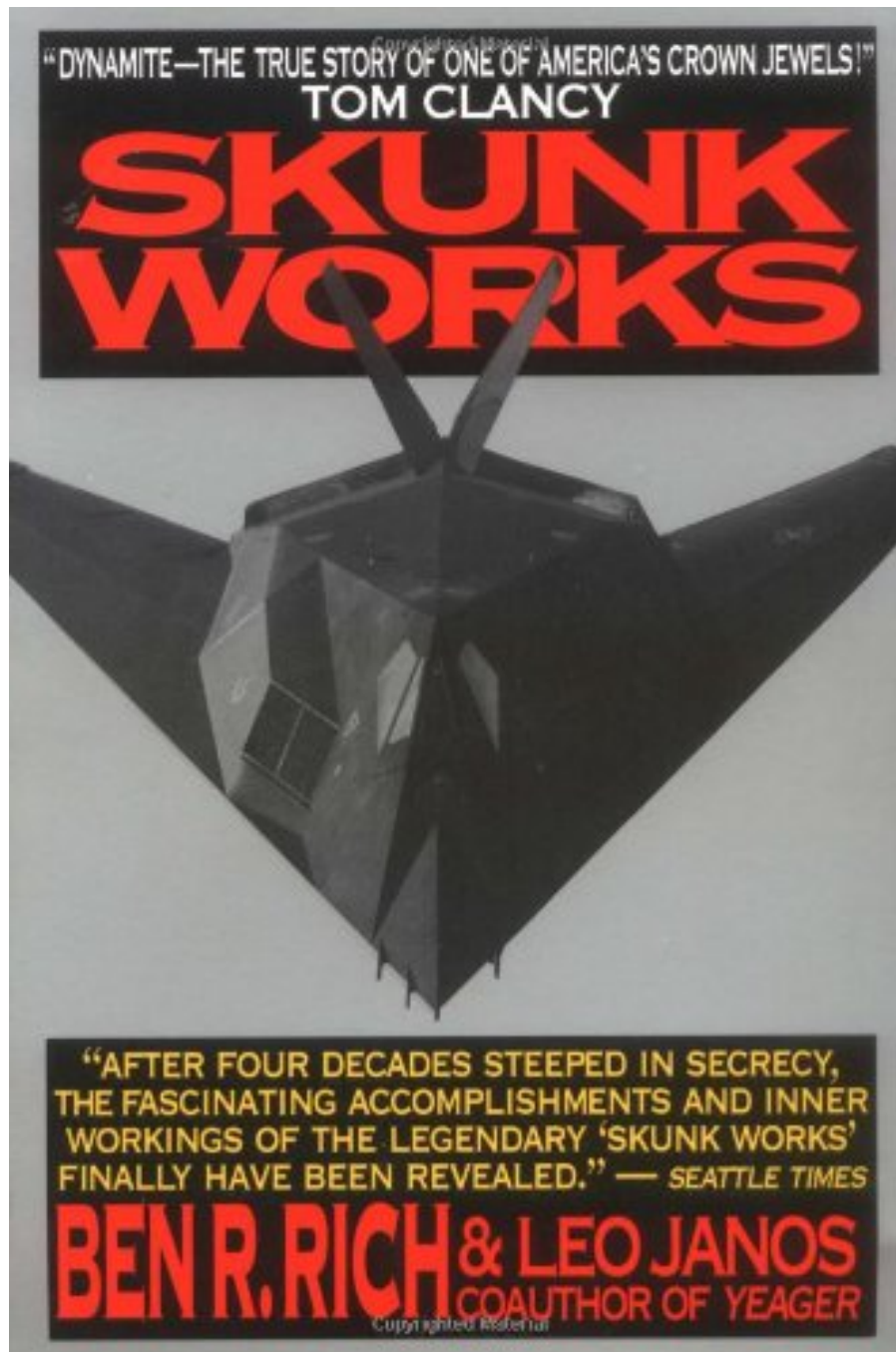


SKUNK WORKS: A PERSONAL MEMOIR OF MY YEARS AT LOCKHEED BY BEN R. RICH, LEO JANOS



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From the development of the U-2 to the Stealth fighter, the never-before-told story behind America's high-stakes quest to dominate the skies Skunk Works is the true story of America's most secret and successful aerospace operation. As recounted by Ben Rich, the operation's brilliant boss for nearly two decades, the chronicle of Lockheed's legendary Skunk Works is a drama of cold war confrontations and Gulf War air combat, of extraordinary feats of engineering and human achievement against fantastic odds. Here are up-close portraits of the maverick band of scientists and engineers who made the Skunk Works so renowned. Filled with telling personal anecdotes and high adventure, with narratives from the CIA and from Air Force pilots who flew the many classified, risky missions, this book is a riveting portrait of the most spectacular aviation triumphs of the twentieth century.

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- Binding: Paperback
- 372 pages

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81 of 82 people found the following review helpful.

A gem on many levels

By John H. Hwung

This book is a gem on many levels:

1) On the history and development of spy planes: This has been covered by many previous reviews on this book. So, I won't write more here.

2) On creativity: There are a lot of books on creativity. Many of them are trivial. Most are written by people who themselves have not design or deliver noteworthy innovations that are of national or international significance. This book is different. It is written by a person who has contributed innovations at, and even run Skunk Works, which has delivered innovation after innovation that are internationally significant.

How does a smart scientist or engineer determine if an organization is a place of major technical inventions? This book tells you the characteristics of such organizations. How do you organize and run a place that can deliver breakthrough innovations at bargain prices? This book gives you the principles on how to do it correctly.

3) On cold war and patriotism: This book gives you a glimpse into the cold war, and the hair-triggering tension of nuclear war between U.S. and the ex-Soviet Union. Also, it shows the patriotism among the U.S. government officials, top military echelons, pilots, and civilian scientists and engineers. Even more, it shows how Skunk Works' technologies tipped the power towards the U.S.

4) On biographies: This book is a partial and vivid biography of both Kelly Johnson and Ben Rich. Their personal traits, both strengths and flaws, are clearly described.

5) On Navy's major shortcomings: Kelly's fifteenth principle of rather to starve than to deal with the Navy is nothing short of astonishment. The descriptions of the Navy's sticking to Aegis frigate rather than Skunk Works' SWATH ship, and preferring traditional submarines rather than stealth submarines are so, so astounding. Right now, U.S. has the world's greatest naval power. U.S. naval power could have been much, much greater and the cost to the tax payers could have been much, much lower cost if the Navy had adopted

stealth technologies from Skunk Works.

6) On the harmful effects of government interferences, wastes and bureaucratic madness: Reading this book and you can understand why we spend so much in defense and get so little in return.

Overall, this book deserves more than 5 stars. It should be read by CEOs and CTOs (Chief Technology Officer) of every major and high tech corporation looking for ways to leapfrog the competitions. It should be read by every Secretary of Defense and officers in high military echelons looking for military technologies to surpass other nations. It should be read by every bright scientists and engineers looking for a place to work where major innovations can be produced. It should be read by every science and engineering professors on how to educate future generations of science and engineering students that can create and innovate.

31 of 31 people found the following review helpful.

Awesome aerospace/military history

By D. J Najarian

Skunk works is the true story behind the coolest, high tech, top secret, aerospace engineering division operated by the Lockheed Martin corporation. Forged by legendary U. Michigan alumnus Kelly Johnson, the Skunk Works has created the coolest planes of recent memory, including the SR-71 Blackbird (currently visible on the flight deck of the Intrepid Aircraft Carrier in NYC), the F117A Stealth Fighter, and the U2 spy plane. The F22 Raptor and the Joint Strike Fighter are also creations of the Skunk Works, but are not covered in this autobiography written by the successor to Kelly Johnson, Ben Rich.

This quick read is well worth your while for a couple of reasons. First, the stories behind the creation of these planes is very interesting. For example, the Skunk Works engineers found the mathematical key to the stealth design buried within an obscure physics journal originally published in Russian. Oddly, the Russians military never capitalized on the principle, despite urgings from the article's Russian author. Furthermore, when the stealth plane was first designed and kept in a secret hanger infested with some bats, the bats couldn't detect the plane with their "sonar-like" sense, and they ended up crashing into it.

The book also makes for excellent military and therefore world history. Accomplishments of the U2 spy plane and the F117-A Stealth Fighter are covered in depth and literally changed the course of world events during the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, the Gulf War, and other skirmishes. Many interesting, behind the scenes (formerly classified?) missions are also revealed in this book. Ben Rich also speculates on the future types of planes currently on the minds of engineers at the Skunk Works, and the implications will change how wars are fought in the future.

For readers who liked this book, NOVA recently published a video on the creation of the Joint Strike Fighter, a contract fought over between the Skunk Works and the Phantom Works of Boeing. These do all fighters are amazing, and this video is definately worth watching for those who enjoyed "Skunk Works."

33 of 34 people found the following review helpful.

Engrossing true story

By J. Turner

I'm not particularly an avid reader of military history books or contemporary history books in general, but after a coworker described this book, curiosity got the better of me and I bought it. I'm glad I did.

Ben R. Rich joined the legendary 'Skunk Works' as a young engineer, worked on some of the most secretive military projects in recent history, and later ended up taking over management of Skunk Works. As a result, perhaps no one else in the world has as much first hand knowledge of these projects, and no one else is better positioned to chronicle some of America's military crown jewels.

Rich (and Janos) have crafted a unique book that gives Ben Rich story, with interesting first hand accounts from pilots, air force personnel, and highly placed government officials. Rich covers the struggles encountered while building various classified aircraft: the U2, SR-71 BlackBird, the stealth fighter, the stealth boat, among others. He also lightly delves into the darker side of the defense industry: politics, waste,

and bureaucracy.

An amazing read, and highly recommended.

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