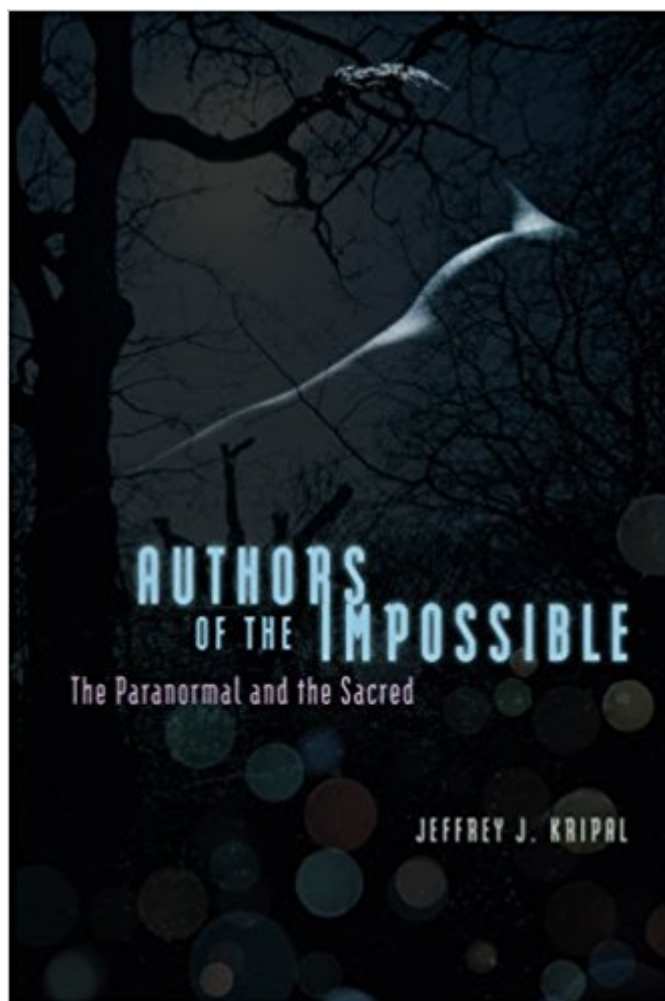


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Authors Of The Impossible: The Paranormal And The Sacred



Synopsis

Most scholars dismiss research into the paranormal as pseudoscience, a frivolous pursuit for the paranoid or gullible. Even historians of religion, whose work naturally attends to events beyond the realm of empirical science, have shown scant interest in the subject. But the history of psychical phenomena, Jeffrey J. Kripal contends, is an untapped source of insight into the sacred and by tracing that history through the last two centuries of Western thought we can see its potential centrality to the critical study of religion. Kripal grounds his study in the work of four major figures in the history of paranormal research: psychical researcher Frederic Myers; writer and humorist Charles Fort; astronomer, computer scientist, and ufologist Jacques Vallee; and philosopher and sociologist Bertrand Russell. Through incisive analyses of these thinkers, Kripal ushers the reader into a beguiling world somewhere between fact, fiction, and fraud. The cultural history of telepathy, teleportation, and UFOs; a ghostly love story; the occult dimensions of science fiction; cold war psychic espionage; galactic colonialism; and the intimate relationship between consciousness and culture all come together in *Authors of the Impossible*, a dazzling and profound look at how the paranormal bridges the sacred and the scientific.

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Customer Reviews

If there is one common human responsibility, it is to evolve beyond our parents. Jeff Kripal has moved this responsibility to another level. He is one of the few academics in religious studies who has evolved out of dogma of scientific-materialist and absolute cultural relativisms. This is no mean accomplishment considering that one first has to conform and perform excellently to get into a top

graduate institution. Once there, the orthodoxy is more deeply inculcated and conformity is closely supervised. Then, just to make sure no heretics slip through, there is a seven-year probation period with peer review at every corner before one has the possibility of achieving academic tenure. No wonder the world passes academia by. Congratulations to Dr. Jeff and to his editor at the University of Chicago Press. How often is an author allowed judicially to use the f*** word in academic discourse? Dr. Jeff has written a book about a variety of unexplained phenomena (e.g., paranormal and psi) from a 21st-century perspective. This means that he has moved beyond dualistic either/or thinking and beyond the taboo of subjectivity (see B. Alan Wallace's great book with the same name). Indeed, at his best Dr. Jeff has demonstrated cases of a nondual confluence of subject-object (for Schroedinger fans, it can be expressed metaphorically but not literally as the collapse of the wave function) as he delves into what has heretofore been "forbidden knowledge." It has been forbidden because any inquiry with any degree of openness into these realms reveals the (appalling IMO) explanatory poverty of science or religious studies paradigms. This book, in a very polite, erudite, entertaining, and direct way shows just how "the King has no clothes." What does this mean? A lot.

Jeffrey Kripal has a weird style. I've never seen a Chicago UP book with so many three word sentences. Really just three. And four word paragraphs. And f\$#%&ing bad language. For effect. I had to force myself to get through the first 50 or so pages. His flashy hippy-geek-mystic persona mellows out toward the end, however. (Or maybe I just got used to it.) But then his persona is part of the point, and I generally sympathize with that point. Kripal is selling us an alternative narrative of modern experience, a narrative that has been marginalized by the dogmatic tendency of organized religion and, more importantly, institutional science. Kripal is busting out, and he sounds like it. He has a refreshingly confident way of telling us that the world is weird. Very weird. Paranormally weird. (And that is just how he would say it.) Most useful to me, he gives us a way of talking about the undoubtedly "subjective" character of paranormal events--he focuses on UFOs, but the same applies to NDEs, spirit communication, etc.--while affirming their empirical reality. The key insight of the whole book is what he calls the "dialectic of consciousness and culture," which is basically postmodernism regrounded in a metaphysics of consciousness. Consciousness is a real thing that is really pushing the world somewhere, but the only way we ever know pure consciousness is through a kaleidoscope of stories that write themselves through ourselves, through language, and--impossibly--the natural world. Kripal does not quite allay my concern with the diffuse character and absence of clear moral direction in the "New Age."

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