

Reading the Enemy's Mind: Inside Star Gate—America's Psychic Espionage Program by Paul H. Smith. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2005. 507 pp. \$24.95 (hardcover). ISBN 0-312-87515-0.

In 1983 Paul Smith was a thirty-something INSCOM officer living in pleasant, leafy Fort Meade, Maryland, and making his way through a typical Army intelligence career, when he noticed something odd about two of his neighbors. Although they were Army officers like himself, Fred Atwater and Tom McNear always wore civilian clothes—McNear even sported a beard—and Smith soon had the feeling that whatever they did for the Army was not only extremely secret but also, somehow, **weird**. As Smith eventually discovered, they worked for INSCOM's psychic spying unit: Atwater was the ops officer, and McNear was a recently trained "remote viewer". Noting that Smith had artistic talent—the way he had rendered a cat stalking a butterfly reminded them of some remote viewing-related automatic-sketching techniques—they suggested that Smith consider joining the remote viewers. By the end of the year he was on the team.

The unit had been active since 1978, using Army personnel selected, in effect, for strong natural psi ability. By the time of Smith's arrival most of these originals had retired or rotated out to more ordinary Army duties, and in any case the Army wanted fresh officers—the less self-consciously "psychic" the better—to learn a new RV training system developed for the Army at the think-tank SRI in California.

The primary developer of the new "coordinate remote viewing" (CRV) system was not some lab-coated scientist but a cigar-chomping New York artist, astrologer, and psychic named Ingo Swann—best known as SRI's longest-serving psi research subject. With support from program manager Harold Puthoff at SRI, Swann had convinced the Pentagon that his way would lead to better RVers, and in 1982 he had received his first trainees, including Tom McNear and another member of the Fort Meade unit. Smith and three other volunteers—two Army captains and one female civilian analyst—formed the second and last group of Swann's trainees from Fort Meade. They spent several months in 1984 at the feet of the master, first at SRI's campus in California and later at the think-tank's New York offices.

Swann's training scheme was an attempt not only to boost the RV program but also to save it from failure. In the earlier years of the program the emphasis had been on raw talent rather than training. The program's preferred research subjects—including civilians Pat Price, Hella Hammid, and Keith Harary at SRI and Army warrant officer Joe McMoneagle at Fort Meade—had seemed genetically gifted at accessing presumed psi data and had used their own methods to remote-view targets. McMoneagle, for example, worked in a near-dreaming, "hypnagogic" state, typically in a dark, sound-damped chamber where he sleepily murmured his observations into a collar mike. The sensational RV sessions he, Price, and the others produced were bound in a "red book," which the program managers showed to potential supporters in Washington. Yet it was clear that the RVers could be

off-target—in convincing detail—at least as often as they were on-target. It was also true that at least some of their more celebrated data had been generated with the help of feedback about the targets from the tasking agencies. Few, if any, of the program's clients in the intelligence community wanted to lose access to the RVer's, but it was believed—by the CIA in particular—that unless someone were to find a way to separate the "signal" from the "noise" in RV, the technique would never become fully operational and eventually the program would wither and die.

Swann and Puthoff by the early 1980s had recognized that extrasensory perception was really a form of subliminal perception. In other words, the remote viewer was thought of as having only brief, multi-sensory (or maybe pseudo-sensory) glimpses of his or her target—too brief to bring the target fully into consciousness. The RVer's brain, it was believed, took these simple, subliminal percepts and automatically tried to select the higher-order patterns in memory that best matched them. If the target was, for example, a B-2 Stealth bomber, the viewer might be able to verbalize simple attributes ("black," "rounded edges") and might be able to sketch some basic shapes, but his or her efforts to provide a higher-order description ("manta ray," "Corvette," "frisbee") would be fraught with error. Swann's new CRV system was meant to enable the remote viewers to identify and ignore this higher-order analytical noise (which Swann termed "analytical overlay"). After years of personal conflict with other civilian research subjects like Harary and Hammid at SRI, Swann also wanted a system that would work for ordinary, intelligent military officers—men and women who would keep a lid on their egos and follow orders.

Smith provides a good, detailed account of his training with the colorful Swann and of his own subsequent career as a remote viewer at Fort Meade. One advantage Smith has over previous authors is his access to a set of documents declassified by the government after the program's termination and released to the public just a few years ago. He also, remarkably, appears to have retained a pile of records and notes from his days at Fort Meade, including the unit's ops officer's log. With these in hand, plus his own direct memory of events, he is able to provide many new and fascinating anecdotes of RV operations.

Although the actual performance of the Fort Meade unit will probably never be known completely—many clients provided no end-of-project feedback, for example, and some apparently did not even keep records of their taskings—Smith does at least begin to get beyond the anecdotes to some quantitative data. In a series of projects in 1990 for a Pentagon anti-narcotics unit known as Joint Task Force 4, for example:

strong correlations between our findings and actual [drug] busts were found in eleven of the projects, or 34.4 percent; some correlation was found in ten, or 31.2 percent; and in another eleven (34.4 percent) no correlation was seen. I remember we were personally told that on a number of occasions federal and local law-enforcement officials were able to arrest suspects and recover contraband thanks to the information we provided.

Despite high points like these, it seems that most of the dramatic tension during Smith's years as a remote viewer was generated not by psychic espionage

missions but by factional strife—pro- and anti-RV—within the intelligence community itself. Safe within INSCOM (Army intelligence) at the time Smith arrived, the Fort Meade unit was suddenly kicked out of the Army after the career demise of its most fervent champion, INSCOM commander General Albert "Spoonbender" Stubblebine. It thereafter survived precariously as a DIA project with support from DIA S&T boss Jack Vorona and several influential senators, including Appropriations Committee chairman Robert Byrd (D-WVA). By the time Smith, an Arabic speaker, was transferred to a traditional military intelligence slot for the invasion of Iraq in 1990, Vorona had just retired and those who opposed the RV program were sharpening their claws for the final attack.

Smith believes that the unit's demise owed more to the opposition of these skeptics than to any shortcomings of the RV program itself. Lieutenant General William Odom, who served as the Army's Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence in the early 1980s (and later headed NSA), is portrayed as having been particularly irrational in his opposition to the RV program. We are told that General Harry Soyster, who kicked the program from INSCOM as soon as he succeeded Stubblebine in 1984, later was promoted to be DIA's chief and was dismayed to hear that the RV unit was still alive and kicking: "You mean I wasn't able to get rid of that tar baby?" In 1994 Senator Byrd lost his Appropriations Committee chairmanship when the Senate shifted to Republican control, and the program was soon killed, in classic Washington fashion, with the commissioning of a "study"^m—a key author being Ray Hyman, a card-carrying member of CSICOP and a perennial bogeyman of paranormal research.

Smith also makes clear that some harm came to the program from its own supporters. Exhibit A is General Stubblebine, who held spoonbending sessions with his senior officers and also pushed the RVers and dozens of INSCOM staffers to attend the New Ageish Monroe Institute, where they were encouraged to have "out of body experiences" with the aid of audio tapes that Bob Monroe had developed. The Pentagon backlash came in 1984, and the RV program suffered along with Stubblebine's other paranormal-oriented projects.

As Smith's account proceeds, more and more flakiness seems to rise up around remote viewing. Instead of treating their collection of RV data as the error-prone product it was, some of the members of the unit started to treat it as gospel truth—with predictably unhealthy results. Even before Smith's training finished in 1984, Tom McNear frightened his wife and Smith's with the RV-derived "news" that they all would be annihilated soon by some secret Russian superweapon. Another unit member, Ed Dames, began to use remote viewing almost exclusively, and obsessively, against "anomalies" such as UFOs and angels, and by the early 1990s he was preaching that a horde of Martians was shortly to rise up from the New Mexico desert.

Smith struck me as perhaps the most down-to-earth of all the Fort Meade RVers I encountered, and in his book he tries to distance himself from all the flakiness. But I do wish he had tried harder to tackle a question that has always

puzzled me: What is the real relationship between psi and, loosely speaking, the "esoteric belief-system" with its seemingly uncritical acceptance of almost anything supernatural or paranormal? The one seldom appears without the other. Is this because having an esoteric belief system in the first place is important to psi functioning, as a sort of disinhibiting factor? This seems likely, but is that all there is to the connection? The fact that successful remote viewing supposedly requires the suppression of analytical "noise" should have cued everyone to the possibility that long-term RV, and maybe playing with altered states in general, impairs one's analytical functions, e.g., one's ability to think critically.

Smith retains a lot of admiration for Ingo Swann and his CRV system, and his discussion of Swann's theory and methodology is engaging and takes up much of the book. Even here, though, the problems with the RV program are in evidence. Swann's (and Puthoffs') insights on subliminal perception are surely valuable; however, I think Swann ran too far with them. The structure of his original CRV scheme seems overcomplicated; its underlying hypotheses are questionable. Swann's use of the real geographical coordinates of a target to start a CRV session effectively unblinds (and distracts) the viewer—and Swann's justification for this amounts to hand-waving. Although such a scheme might have passed muster with Stubblebine, I can see how it would drive a serious scientist up the wall. For the reader it might come as a relief that Smith and his colleagues ultimately dispense with geographical coordinates and use less distracting, non-unblinding forms of initiating their RV sessions.

Did Swann's method boost the reliability of remote viewing, as originally intended? Were ordinary CRV-trained men and women better RVers than the best "naturals" like Price (who died in 1975) and McMoneagle (who retired in 1984)? Although the survival of the program at one point supposedly hinged on these questions, the program does not seem to have generated the answers—it just kept going. Most likely Swann's CRV project lay outside the reach of formal scientific evaluation because of its reliance on geographical coordinates. Smith tells us that near the end of his tour at Fort Meade he was asked to look over the unit's performance post-1985, and from the available documents he had the impression that the coordinate RVers in the unit were more reliable than those in the unit who occasionally used looser techniques, including one woman who "channelled" a trio of entities. Maybe Smith is correct here—but maybe he is shooting fish in a barrel. In any case, there is no evidence from his account that any of the key sponsors felt that Swann had truly succeeded.

Even so, the Fort Meade unit did keep some clients interested for many years, and there is no doubt that its product at times was consequential. The Joint Task Force 4 project began in late 1989 when Colonel William Johnson, an energetic staff officer for the Soyster-chaired Military Intelligence Board (MIB), was asked in effect to prove to the MIB (and by implication, RV-supportive senators) that the RV unit was worthless and should be shut down. After the better part of a year using Smith and the other Fort Meade RVers against drug smugglers, Colonel Johnson came away a believer—not just in remote viewing as a

legitimate phenomenon but also in its utility as a routine intelligence tool. In the end, though, there just were not enough Colonel Johnsons in the intelligence community to sustain the program.

As disappointing as it was for Smith that the program was cancelled, his account makes clear that (a) the level of funding was never tremendously high nor did it really need to be, and (b) the government officials who controlled the program did not always push it in directions that enhanced remote viewing's usefulness or scientific validity. Given the urgent spying priorities of the post 9/11 era, I would guess that the government by now has re-funded elements of the program or at least has reached out to some former participants. But if I were a scientist and wanted to realize the promise of remote viewing and of psi generally, I would be inclined to keep the generals and the espiocrats at arm's length from now on. With so much interest in the paranormal in America today, would it really be so hard to set up a modest but serious RV research center with private financing? Its mission—to prove and to improve remote viewing's practical utility—would be relatively easy if remote viewing's utility is already as robust as its proponents claim.

JIM SCHNABEL

jschnabel_rov@hotmail.com

A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel and Einstein by Palle Yourgrau. Basic Books, Perseus Books Group, 2005. 210 pp. \$24.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-465-09293-4.

Ever since Hawking¹ wrote *A Brief History of Time*, which sold an unexpectedly large number of copies (e.g., 10⁶), Time became a buzzword to put into a book title in hopes of achieving a similar financial publishing success. Another example among many (see my review²) is Barbour's *The End of Time*³. Other examples where Time is a hidden rather than explicit promotional ingredient include Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*⁴. The slightly facetious observation that I am pushing here, that the word Time in a title sells, is on the other hand balanced by the less-than-facetious observation that underneath it all, in my opinion, nobody really understands Time. So there is a big mystery here to write books about.

Turning to the book at hand, *A World Without Time*⁵, one should take special note of the author's admission (in Acknowledgements, viii) that he and Hao Wang⁶, a close associate of Gödel for many years and with whom Yourgrau had many discussions, both confess to finding the topic of time "uncongenial" even though it was of great interest to all three of them. I am slightly paraphrasing their passages, but when they couple their "resistance" to discuss time with each other with their "regret" that they did not do so . . . well, you have to come away with the impression that they really could never conclude much at all.