

BOOK REVIEW

Our Secret Powers Telepathy, Clairvoyance, and Precognition: A Short History of (Nearly) Everything Paranormal by Terje G. Simonsen. Pari, Italy: Pari Publishing, 2018. 531 pp. \$14.23 (paperback), \$4.99 Kindle. ISBN: 978-88-95604-33-6.

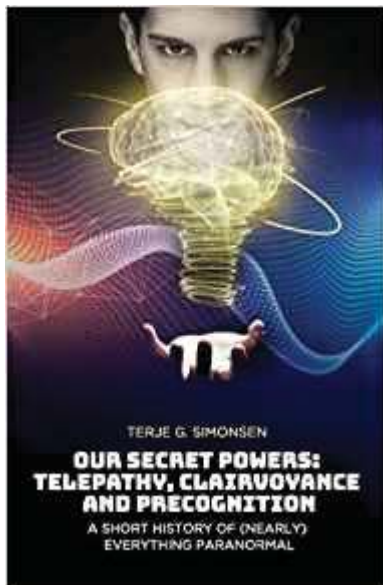
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Terje G. Simonsen is a Norwegian journalist who has written a very readable, inexpensive overview of the psi field for the interested lay public. It is fairly comprehensive, covering a wide swath of topics from anthropology and archaeology through laboratory experimentation to consciousness studies, philosophy, and research on reincarnation. It also includes references and links for each chapter, and separate indexes for subjects and names. These are very useful for the reader who would like to follow up and learn more about the many subjects covered.

The writing is clear, entertaining, and at times delightfully droll. (Some examples from his section headings are: “Indiana Schwartz and the Lost Treasures of Alexandria,” “Which is Further Away: York or New York?—Entanglement and Non-locality,” “Ian Stevenson: Reincarnation, Again, and Again and Again . . .”). He presents dry data in interesting and amusing ways, and the book is sprinkled with lots of intriguing anecdotes.

Not that there isn’t anything for those of us who are familiar with most of what’s presented here: I found much that I had no knowledge of prior to reading it, for example some information about psi research in Simonsen’s homeland, and a good review of some material I hadn’t considered in a long time. For instance, I had known a bit about the Bulgarian psychiatrist Giorgi Lozanov, but I had only a hazy memory of his work with a woman called Baba Vanga, a quite extraordinary psychic medium and healer who was actually given a state salary at one time. The story is engrossing and ends with the author’s meeting with the then-octogenarian Lozanov who by that time had been held under house arrest, banned from contact with Westerners, and had most of his research material confiscated by that same state.

When asked how the amazing psychic feats of Baba Vanga were possible, Lozanov answered with what I think is perhaps the most important concept the reader should come away with: “The limitlessness of Mind!”



Lozanov elaborated further saying that he believed that all learning and developing, “normal” and “paranormal,” had to do with the steady opening up to more of this limitlessness. In other words, as Simonsen explains, “Consciousness is not limited to the brain, but . . . also has nonlocal and non-temporal dimensions. . . .” (p. 97)

Much of the psi field is covered—and covered well—in this “short history,” but as the subtitle suggests by the qualifying “(nearly) everything,” there are some omissions. I was disappointed to find an inadequate discussion of macro-PK phenomena. He discusses Matthew Manning’s “poltergeist” experiences, but there is

no mention of the in-depth research into RSPK at all. Simonsen very briefly mentions Rudi Schneider and Nina Kulagina, but he gives the impression of seriously doubting or not taking seriously their abilities. He spends a lot more time on Uri Geller and seems more convinced of the Israeli’s abilities, but there is not a word about D. D. Home, Eusapia Palladino, Sir William Crookes, or Charles Richet, to mention a few glaring omissions, anywhere in the more than 500 pages. Neither is there any discussion of psychic photography: You will not find Serios or Eisenbud in the name index. This is an unfortunate omission in an otherwise fine overview of the field.

Perhaps Mr. Simonsen will look further into the area of macro PK and put out another book on the subject. He might start with my book (unabashed plug) *The Spirit of Dr. Bindelof* (2006) and follow it up with Stephen Braude’s *The Limits of Influence* (1986, 1991). And while it might be beyond his boggle threshold, he could take on Michael Grosso’s excellent *The Man Who Could Fly* (2016).

The only other “nit” I have, also having to do with a type of macro PK in this otherwise excellent book, is with the description of Kulagina’s stopping of a frog’s heart in a Russian laboratory and the implication that she might also be able to stop a human heart. (It caused quite a stir at the time.) The truth is the frog’s heart had been surgically excised and was kept beating in a saline solution with electrodes attached to it to record its activity. Kulagina was asked to try to make the heart beat faster, which she

did, and then to stop it using her PK. The experiment was misrepresented in the journalists' Ostrander and Schroeder's popular, but not always accurate, book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (1974), which Simonsen cites as one of many references. This story and subsequent claims by a former KGB officer suggesting that psychotronic weapons caused Boris Yeltsin's heart attack, only added to the public's—and many scientists'—fear of psychokinesis.

But I was glad to see in Simonsen's book a discussion of the taboo among so-called “hard” scientists about parapsychology. In a chapter on archaeology he writes:

For a scientist to meet with a psychic is likely to be a *liaison dangereuse*, which might easily develop into a brutal career killer. If one is perceived to be unscientific or unserious it could swiftly become *adios* to collegial respect, promotions, scholarships, and support. (p. 48)

Later on, in discussing the lack of this kind of research in his own country of Norway, he acknowledges that the most likely reason is “the *stigma* that goes with superstition, or ‘parapsychosis’ as it was humorously dubbed by . . . Helge Krog.”

He then quotes the poet Andre Bjerke 's witty description of the stigma:

It is more dangerous for a professor to be caught red-handed doing research [on the paranormal] than it is for a Conservative politician to be found dead drunk in a brothel. What hitherto has dictated university science's sentiment towards parapsychology is an anxious sidelong glance towards colleagues: 'If it becomes known that I've seen a ghost, I'm done for at the faculty.' (p. 225)

Unfortunately this same attitude prevails in the U.S. and in many other countries as well. Perhaps books such as Mr. Simonsen's will help to change some attitudes.

—ROSEMARIE PILKINGTON

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