

## ESSAY REVIEW

**The Star Gate Archives, Volumes 1–4, Reports of the United States Government Sponsored Psi Program, 1972–1995** edited by Edwin C. May and Sonali Bhatt Marwaha. McFarland, 2018–2019. 2,342 pp. (all 4 volumes). \$95 for each volume (paperback). ISBNs: 978-1-4766-6752-2; 978-1-4766-6753-9; 978-1-4766-6754-6; 978-1-4766-6755-3. Vol. 1: Remote Viewing, 1972–1984, 546 pp. Vol. 2: Remote Viewing, 1985–1995, 614 pp. Vol. 3: Psychokinesis, 467 pp. Vol. 4: Operational Remote Viewing: Memorandums and Reports, 715 pp.

### REVIEWED BY DAMIEN BRODERICK

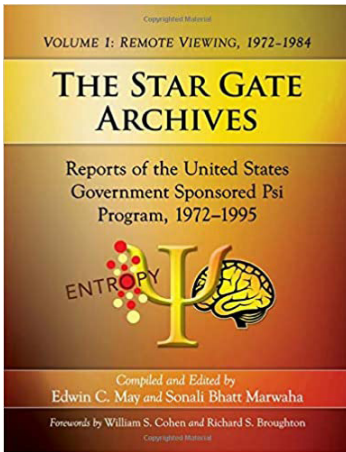
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For your consideration, two fragments of Twilight history (as Rod Serling might have put it): a dimension as time-strung as eternity, unnerving as a grating laugh at three a.m. on a dark, chilly morning.

One: In 1946, a would-be suicide named George B. J. Stewart attracted the interest of a beefy, bearded, wingless angel named Santa Claus, and discovered how to shift into mirror universes. The post-Second World War US Congress quickly established a research center to contact other angels, especially those with working wings, and subsidized the program until 1974, when President Nixon's resignation caused funding to dry up. Despite top-secret classification masking the CLARENCE program, Stewart is rumored to be alive and still active at the North Pole at the age of 111.

Two: In 1972, three Scientologists and the brother-in law of the third best chess grandmaster in history were invited by the US military to launch what would become a \$19.933 million program devoted to



research into psychic powers. The initial emphasis was operational, with trained clairvoyants casting their attention into far lands and even the future. Many branches of the intelligence community sought specific double- or triple-blind tasking, alarmed by rumors that the Soviets were making advances in this domain. Despite popular rumors, the CIA was not heavily involved; the major funder was DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency). Along with NASA, DARPA, US Army Medical Research and

Development Command, Foreign Technology Division, and others, DIA repeatedly contracted for this espionage methodology.

Which, if either, of these ludicrous accounts is true? Well, it turns out that CLARENCE is merely a tall story (one I just concocted). By contrast, military research programs into psychic phenomena became public after long-hidden secret documents surfaced. Most recently, four immense volumes have been published by McFarland—dubbed collectively *The Star Gate Archives*—providing an opportunity to track government-funded scientific research into psi (purported mental abilities able to reach beyond limits established by canonical sciences). Despite those limits, for two decades the science edge of the program was situated on the West Coast at Stanford Research Institute (SRI) and then Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC). A 2017 summary paper states:

In July 1972, Russell Targ, as principal investigator, submitted a grant application on Research on Techniques to Enhance Extraordinary Human Perception to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, NASA, with Dr. Harold Puthoff as co-investigator. This started the SRI program in psi research, which eventually closed in 1995 at SAIC. (Marwaha & May, 2017)

Its two most effective founding viewers were Ingo Swann and Pat Price, now deceased, both devotees of L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology cult.

For internal security reasons, the success or failure of individual efforts were rarely revealed. But since the psi operatives were sometimes called back for further clandestine tasking, it seems evident that the results were often sufficiently effective and accurate in support of more conventional intelligence activities. There's ample evidence for this in the various volumes. One 1984 letter of appreciation from the Deputy Director for Communications Security at the National Security Agency is displayed in Volume 4.

To: Commander U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command  
ATTN: Chief, Security Systems Planning Division [ . . . ]

1. We wish to express our thanks and appreciation for your outstanding support to [REDACTED] At our SG1A request, you were able to provide immediate, specific information, some of which was later confirmed or complemented by information from other sources. Overall, your support considerably enhanced the scope of the project and resulted in tangible success and genuine impact on U.S. national security.
2. [REDACTED] has received attention at the highest levels of the U.S. government. Your contribution is considered significant, and will be used for future considerations as it has been in the past. [ . . . ]

Despite such cagey testimonials, the program was formally closed down in 1995 when, after a rudimentary examination, the CIA deemed the results insufficiently reliable. See deft individual summaries of these four volumes by Mörck (2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b).

Most of the operational applications (or, more candidly, psychic spying) were conducted in a rather shabby building on the grounds of Fort Meade, Maryland. These efforts were scrutinized, approved, and improved by authorized and usually disinterested specialists including a Scientific Oversight Committee (1986–1995), an Institutional Review Board, and a Department of Defense Policy Oversight Committee. A notable advocate of the project was Dr. Jack Vorona, then Deputy

Director Science and Technology, Defense Intelligence Agency. Here is a startling summary from the fourth volume:

Between the SRI and the remote viewing (RV) operations group at Ft. Meade, a total of 504 separate missions were tasked by a variety of agencies that required 2,865 individual remote viewings to accomplish the stated missions. Of the 19 client agencies from 1973–1995, 17 were returning customers.

So how is this seeming craziness possible? Is it more believable than imagining a military research study of Santa Claus building toys with his elves in an icy workshop? It's a matter of credibility, but of a special kind. Many established scientists do not find psi believable because it's, well, darn it, just too gosh-heck *unbelievable*. No need to look at the data, at the purported empirical evidence. Do you need to *test* the claims of flat-earthers and foil-hat schizophrenics? Psi has to be just as fraudulent, critics assert, or carelessly gathered and incorrectly analyzed.

Regard the standard skeptical reasoning in action. Recently, a notable academic journal published “The Experimental Evidence for Parapsychological Phenomena: A Review” by Lund University’s Etzel Cardeña, Thorsen Professor of Psychology (Cardeña, 2018). In June 2019, two US psychologists rebuked Cardeña, explaining how they just know in their rigorous bones that such psi capacities are non-existent. A. S. Reber and J. E. Alcock published “Searching for the Impossible: Parapsychology’s Elusive Quest” in the same journal (Reber & Alcock, 2019a). Several months later, a slightly revised version appeared in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, where Alcock and Reber stated their approach even more firmly:

Recently, *American Psychologist* published a review of the evidence for parapsychology that supported the general claims of *psi* (the umbrella term often used for anomalous or paranormal phenomena). We present an opposing perspective and a broad-based critique of the entire parapsychology enterprise. Our position is straightforward. Claims made by parapsychologists cannot be true. The effects reported can have no ontological status; the data have no existential value. (Reber & Alcock, 2019b)

Do they know this because of their scrupulous study of those claims and experimental data? No, it turns out. In their revision, they state baldly:

*We did not examine the data for psi*, to the consternation of the parapsychologist who was one of the reviewers. Our reason was simple: *the data are irrelevant*. We used a classic rhetorical device . . . a form of hyperbole so extreme that it is, in effect, impossible. Ours was ‘pigs cannot fly’—hence data that show they can are the result of flawed methodology, weak controls, inappropriate data analysis, or fraud. [Italics added] (Reber & Alcock, 2019b)

They were hardly the first to make this eyes-tight-closed confession. Famous science writer Isaac Asimov rejected psi, saying “If you came to me . . . and demonstrated [psychic phenomena] I would probably proceed to disbelieve my eyes. Sorry . . .” It’s a common assessment, so it seems hard to believe that psi (although not Santa Claus) should be put to the test with government approval and funding. When it was shut down after 23 years, though, the justification was not “It’s *impossible!*” Rather, former US Senator William S. Cohen—for ten years the ranking member of the Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee—notes that his initial “high bar of doubt began to descend as I listened to and observed the participants in the Star Gate program” (Foreword, in all 4 volumes). He concludes: “I believe it was a mistake for us to abandon the effort . . .” Insiders have told me that the closure was driven not by *failures* of the program but by its frightening degree of *success*. Certain influential military and political figures were convinced that such remote viewing successes had to be due to . . . *the influence of Satan*. But in general it was post-Cold War budget cuts and downsizing—the “peace dividend”—that really spelled its doom.

So how successful was remote viewing, done right? The Introduction to Volume 1 notes:

On 5 October 1983, Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh, Jr., was briefed by LTC [Lieutenant colonel] Brian Buzby, project manager, INSCOM Center Lane. Buzby reported

that about 350 missions out of 700 (50%) were deemed to possess intelligence value, and 85% showed positive evidence for remote viewing . . . a CL [Center Lane] 1990 analysis of forty-one evaluated operational remote viewings indicates that 41.5% of the remote viewings had intelligence value. . . . Considering the nature of remote viewing these numbers are truly remarkable.

Similarly, a 1983 Grill Flame report states:

evaluation by appropriate intelligence community specialists indicates that a remote viewer is able by this process to generate useful data corroborated by other intelligence data. As is generally true with other human sources, the information is fragmentary and imperfect, and therefore should not be relied on alone but is best utilized in conjunction with other resources.

When the documentation of the two decades of research and practical remote viewing was opened up by the CIA at the start of the 21st century, the declassified material was indigestible, unordered, impossible for any but the most deeply embedded to comprehend. Edwin May, long-term director of the program, with his associate Sonali Bhatt Marwaha (who did most of the document sorting and scanning scutwork over five years), organized this hoard into a genuine archive preserving the history of this unlikely program, providing notes, bibliographies, appendices, glossary, and indexes. Here is the bottom line, spelled out by Dr. Richard Broughton in a second Foreword:

the most dramatic realization to emerge from Star Gate is that psi could be useful. . . . When intelligence agencies need information about a situation . . . they will deploy all the tools at their disposal. . . . Psi does not enter the picture as some sort of magic power that will give them the answer. It is just one more of the tools that can be deployed. . . . The take-home message is that *psi isn't magic*.

Not only is psi not magic nor diabolic intervention, as the Editors note,

Right from its inception, the SRI–SAIC program has taken a physicalist position [that is, based on known sensory aspects of perception] in the exploration of precognition, clairvoyance, and psychokinesis—primarily a physics, engineering, and cognitive science approach. Although the SRI team explored psychological correlates such as personality (which did not lead them far), there is absolutely no mention of terms such as consciousness (except stray references to consciousness as a general term), non-local consciousness, spirituality, dualism, or religion in the SRI–SAIC reports. (Marwaha & May, 2017)

Little wonder that not only hard-shell scientists repudiate its findings (almost always without reading them); so too do many of the die-hard mystics, reincarnation mediums, prosperity gospel touters, and other devotees of superstition.

Here is a small irony of history that added to the disapproval of those who find the program's last codename cheap, derivative, and comic-bookish. In reality, the science fiction movie *Stargate* came out in 1994 and the TV series in 1997. Both had been preceded by the renaming of the US psi program to Star Gate in 1991. But luckily, these volumes are of more than antiquarian interest. After the multiply-named program was defunded and shuttered, May and some of his colleagues continued developing a theoretical attack on the puzzles of psi at the Laboratories for Fundamental Research in Palo Alto, California, summarized here as well.

Their prime model is DAT—decision augmentation theory—in which an unconscious awareness of future events can bias choices in the present. If a drunken driver is on a ragged course to smash into you from a side street, a psi warning might provide an urgent prompt to slow down or change lanes. Part of that informational schema predicts constraints mapped by entropy gradients, where a future “target” becomes, so to speak, more or less vividly detectable according to how much its elements change. It's easier to detect a nuclear weapon

explosion or a deadly car crash than a cute snoozing bunny or a restful lake.

Crammed with official and long-classified reports on the program, some illustrated, some with handy charts, these four books range from 466 to 715 big pages. Two volumes focus on remote viewing, a third on causal psi, aka psychokinesis—for which they found no strong evidence—and a final, portly, behind-the-scenes collection draws upon 11,067 official reports on studies and operations. The first three are hefty, data-choked, double-columned, while the fourth fills each broad page with often name-redacted scans of memoranda, reports, and customer evaluations (yes, hundreds of tables, figures, and equations—a manager’s dream.)

In short, they are not meant for light gym or beach reading. But they might change some skeptical minds, and offer hints of paths to a genuine science and technology of these apparently informational but rare abilities. However, it is all too likely that if a major theoretical breakthrough incorporates precognition, the work of long-ridiculed psi researchers, not least those from the Star Gate program, will be entirely ignored by the new Nobel Prize candidates.

If there is one drawback to these useful compendiums, it is the tightly crammed spines of their large, heavy paperbacks. Without powerful psychokinetic assistance (which, remember, the Star Gate scientists say does not actually exist), you can’t leave the book open on the page without it springing shut. Even holding it down in a muscular wrestling deathlock does not bring it into submission, because on many pages the text at the right or left inner margin vanishes into the spine. You can break the back of the books in numerous places, but that is not recommended. Luckily, McFarland also offers an e-book option, where the small print can be expanded to improve readability, and the spinal crushing is no more. I recommend the e-book editions (which are also about half the price) for home or office reading, and leave the heavy-duty paper volumes for libraries—which should certainly accession this remarkable quartet.



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