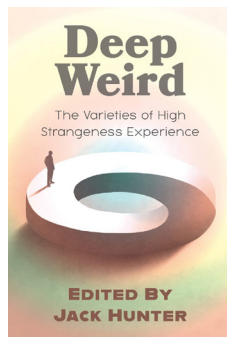


**BOOK AND
MULTIMEDIA
REVIEW**

Deep Weird: The Varieties of High Strangeness Experience

Peter McCue
peter.mccue@virginmedia.com



Deep Weird: The Varieties of High Strangeness Experience: August Night Press.

ISBN: 978-1786772244

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20243345>

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In modern English, the word “weird” is generally used as an adjective, not a noun. Therefore, to me, the main title of this book, *Deep Weird*, sounds ungrammatical. It could have been rendered better as *Deeply Weird* or *Deep Weirdness*. Or the subtitle could have been used as the main title.

The book presents a collection of seventeen essays. With sixteen of them, there’s just one author per essay; with the twelfth essay, there are two. Details about the contributors can be found on pp. 359-365. Biographical information about Dr Jack Hunter (a Wales-based anthropologist), who edited the book, and Dr Jeffrey Kripal (of Rice University, Houston, Texas), who wrote the foreword, can also be found there.

Following a couple of pages of praise for the book from other authors and then a listing of the book’s contents, there’s Kripal’s foreword. His jargonistic bio on p. 362 indicates, among other things, that he “helped create the GEM Program, a doctoral concentration in the study of Gnosticism, Esotericism, and Mysticism” at Rice University. However, I’ve never heard of a “doctoral concentration” before, and I don’t know why Kripal has capitalized *esotericism* and *mysticism*, which I regard as common nouns. He states that he specializes in the study of “extreme religious states and the re-visioning of a New Comparativism.” In the foreword itself, he contends that *Deep Weird* is ultimately about “our own exoticisation, our own fundamental, irreplaceable, irreducible queerness” (p. 3).

After Kripal’s piece, there’s an introductory section by Jack Hunter, who also displays a penchant for opaque and ponderous jargon. At the top of page 14, there’s a badly constructed sentence by him spanning no fewer than eleven lines. At points, Hunter refers to surrealism, a 20th-century movement in art and literature that aimed at giving expression to the supposed ‘unconscious mind’. But he’s stylistically inconsistent, spelling “surrealist” with both an upper case “S” and a lower case one (pp. 26-27).

According to Hunter, the book suggests “that the ‘highly strange’ might [...] be a central feature of extraordinary experiences more generally” (p. 6). But this comes close to *reification* – treating an abstract quality (in this case, “the highly strange” or “high strangeness”) as if it were a *thing*. He indicates that his favored approach to “high strangeness” is one “that is able to transcend current disciplinary and theoretical boundaries, and entertain multiple concurrent theories and processes” (p. 38). He calls this ‘ontological flooding’. To me, though, it sounds like mushy and vague New Age eclecticism masquerading under a pretentious label.

The 17 essays by the guest authors constitute a very mixed bag. With some of them, the ‘message’, if there really is one, is obscured by convoluted language and the use of unusual and undefined expressions, sometimes occurring within quotations. For example, the reader will encounter: “2D anime style” (p. 96); “death doula” (p. 98); “the omi-

nous luminous voluminous numinous" (p. 171); "fibonacci vortex" (p. 174); "nescience" (p. 178); "classic entoptics" (p. 183); "alterity" (p. 231); "hyperparameter optimisation search heuristics" (p. 267). It seems that some of the contributors went into overdrive to give their writing an "academic" or "literary" gloss!

I shall make no attempt to comment, specifically, on all of the essays in the book. Indeed, weary of swimming through verbal treacle, I gave up completely on a couple of them. However, I found some of the presentations lucid and interesting, such as the first one, titled "Synchronicity" (pp. 49-74). This one is by Sharon Hewitt Rawlette and is a readable and wide-ranging chapter on remarkable coincidences. She cites intriguing case material, including experiences of her own. Some of the cases she mentions bear on the question of survival after physical death. However, given that a tricksterish intelligence may be able to orchestrate phenomena to manipulate our beliefs, I think the only sensible position to take on the survival issue is an agnostic one. In other words, I doubt whether psychical research will ever provide cast-iron proof that consciousness survives bodily death.

Other contributions that I found interesting and readable were Gregory Shushan's one on near-death experiences (pp. 75-88), Michael Grosso's chapter on miracles (pp. 113-128), Zofia Weaver's discussion of physical mediumship (pp. 129-148), and Susan Demeter's essay on conjuring up paranormal manifestations (pp. 317-334).

Zelia Edgar's chapter on "entity encounters" is also readable (pp. 211-225). One of the high strangeness cases that she cites is drawn from Stan Gordon's interesting book *Silent Invasion: The Pennsylvania UFO-Bigfoot Casebook* (2010, pp. 227-244). Omitting some of the details, I'll give just a brief summary. The reported events occurred on October 25, 1973. There was a UFO sighting involving multiple witnesses, including a 22-year-old man whom Gordon refers to as Steve Palmer (pseudonym). Along with two boys, he went to a field on his father's farm, where the UFO seemed to have come down. They saw a huge, white-domed structure with a flattish base. A whirring sound was coming from it, and there was a smell in the air, somewhat like burning rubber. They spotted two hair-covered creatures coming towards them, one of which appeared to be over eight feet tall, the other being about seven feet in height. Palmer fired a couple of tracer shots over them. Regarding the second projectile, the larger creature reached up as if to grab it, at which point the UFO suddenly vanished, leaving a ring of luminosity where it had been. The whirring sound also ceased, and the creatures turned and headed towards a wooded area. Palmer fired three live shots at them, but neither creature showed any sign of having been harmed. Subsequently,

there were more strange occurrences, and that night appeared to mark a turning point for Palmer (now deceased), since he went on to have further paranormal experiences over the years. Edgar gives Palmer's real name as George Kowalczyk, although she doesn't reference her source for this information.

Apart from opaque and pretentious wording, I noticed a few other, albeit relatively minor, problems with *Deep Weird*:

- The book has an index, but it's rather thin.
- On page 154, in a chapter titled "Poltergeists and High Strangeness", Alan Murdie alludes to a well-known poltergeist case in South Shields in the north-east of England. He gives the time span as 2006-2007, but my understanding is that the activity began in late 2005 and ceased before the end of 2006. On page 162, Murdie refers to the famous Scottish physical medium "Daniel Dunglas Hume (1883-1886)". However, although the medium's surname was pronounced as "hume", it was spelled as *Home*, and he was born in 1833, not 1883.
- The aforementioned chapter by Zelia Edgar refers to two books by the late John Keel that were published in 2002. They both appear with "Keel, J. A. (2002)" in the References on page 385, but they should have been clearly differentiated, as "Keel, J. A. (2002a)" and "Keel, J. A. (2002b)". On pages 221-222, Edgar refers to a well-known UFO sighting by a police officer called Alan Godfrey in Todmorden, West Yorkshire, England. Edgar gives the date of his experience as November 28, 1980, but the event occurred during the early morning of the following day.
- In Susan Demeter's essay, the word "illicit" is misused for "elicit" on page 321.

And, more generally, there's a problem with the superscript numbers used throughout the book: they're so small that they can be easily missed. In other words, one can read to the bottom of a page, notice a footnote, and then struggle to find the relevant superscript number in the preceding text.

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- Gordon, S. (2010). *Silent invasion: The Pennsylvania UFO-bigfoot casebook* (R. Marsh, Ed.). Privately published.
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