

ESP WARS by Edwin C. May, Victor Rubel, & Loyd Auerbach. Palo Alto, CA: Laboratories for Fundamental Research, 2014. Pp. xii + 323. \$20 (paperback). ISBN 978-1500743000.

The literature concerning the psychic arms race between America and the Soviet Union is an intriguing mixture of fact and fiction. Many of the claims are bound to exceed boggle thresholds, but some seem more plausible. *ESP Wars* allegedly contains the true stories as narrated by some of the key players.

The book starts with a wide-ranging historical survey with accounts from ancient times, including stories about shamans, yogis, and saints. Alongside well-known mediums, there are also fascinating individuals such as Blavatsky and Rasputin who make an appearance. Messing does not appear, but Hanussen, “Prophet of the Third Reich,” does, in a section concerning Nazi occultism, a subject which, like the named individuals, is itself surrounded by myths. When Hitler came to power he began to persecute those involved in the occult, and something similar occurred under Stalin’s regime: “Books on occultism were removed from shelves all across the country, members of esoteric groups were sent to camps and shot” (pp. 44–45). Officially, in the late 1930s occultism and psi research in the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

The history of psi research in the West and the East is also outlined. Oddly, neither the declassified reports nor the accounts by parapsychologists who had been in the Soviet Union are cited or even mentioned. Project MKULTRA, initiated by the CIA in 1953, is briefly covered. According to the authors, the CIA’s interest in psi was due to its “. . . potential both as a means of mental manipulation and as a method of covertly sending and receiving information” (p. 53).

The well-known story about the telepathy experiment involving the U.S. submarine *Nautilus*, which allegedly took place in 1959, is naturally also covered. The authors appear oblivious to Martin Ebon’s (1983) investigation: in short, this suggests it to have been a hoax by the author Jacques Bergier, who may have been deliberately fed disinformation. The story did function as an ignition spark for the psychic arms race—Soviet parapsychologists successfully used it to argue that psi research should start anew. With minor exceptions no psi research has officially been carried out there since the late 1930s. It could thus be argued that the U.S. had a head start.

The Soviets’ attempt to catch up, combined with lack of reliable information and the sensational book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (Ostrander & Schroeder, 1970), created the need for a threat assessment. The zeitgeist in the 1970s presumably also contributed to the U.S. intelligence agencies’ increased interest. Later, in addition to Soviet émigrés’ claims (Starr & McQuaid, 1985), popular books and articles concerning a psychic arms race emerged (McRae, 1984; White, 1988)—the impact of all this is not discussed.

The limits of psi are not known, and this worried the U.S. intelligence agencies. The need for a threat assessment resulted in what is now known as the Star Gate program, which focused on remote viewing. The program can in hindsight be said to have been initiated in 1972 by the CIA, which for a few years supported the research (Kress, 1977/1999; Richelson, 2001). Some in the CIA were clearly impressed by the initial research, but they also became aware of the still unsolved problem concerning how to separate fact from fiction in the remote viewing data. In addition, there was some unwanted publicity about the intelligence agencies’ interest in psi (Wilhelm, 1976, 1977).

Given some stunning results and the lack of reliable information about the development in the Soviet

Union, a military program was nevertheless initiated in 1978 at Ft. Meade.

The authors claim that approximately 3,000 intelligence personnel worldwide were screened with regard to their potential participation in the program. Declassified documents, however, reveal that 251 personnel were considered, 117 initially interviewed, and 6 individuals eventually selected (CIA-RDP96-00788R001100020001-8); one of them was Joseph McMoneagle. Both Edwin May and McMoneagle contribute autobiographical sections; although interesting, they seem somewhat redundant given the book's focus. More interesting are the accounts about search tasks involving remote viewers. One account is unverifiable, but the others can be scrutinized.

One search task (Project 8916) was initiated in order to locate Drug Enforcement Agency agent Charles Jordan. The authors mention only remote viewer Angela Dellafiora Ford's participation, yet 17 sessions focused on finding Jordan and several viewers were involved—their impressions differed from one another. The authors also fail to note that Ford's preferred method is referred to as written remote viewing—like a trance medium, she channeled information from entities (Smith, 2005). In addition, it is far from clear if her impressions really led to the capture of Jordan as the authors claim (Graff, 1998, 2000; Nickell, 2004).

Another case of selective reporting concerns the remote viewers' involvement in the search for the kidnapped Brigadier General James Dozier. He was allegedly impressed by some of the remote viewing data, but it should be noted that it was a Red Brigades member, not McMoneagle's impressions, that provided the clues that led to his location (Graff, 2000). Also briefly covered is the remote viewers' involvement in the Iran hostage crisis—more than 200 sessions focused on this. Andrew Endersby's (2014) examination reveals that there was a lot of erroneous information in the remote viewing data.

The authors also claim that McMoneagle was involved in the attempt to locate a Soviet aircraft which had crashed in Zaire (this claim turns up elsewhere as well). The plane, however, crashed in March 1979, before he had completed his remote viewing training. That said, data from two remote viewers, Rosemary Smith and Gary Langford, made the search team shift their focus, which caused them to encounter natives who had found the plane (Graff, 2000; Smith, 2005).

Relatively little is said about the U.S. research on remote viewing. The reader is reminded of the researchers' inability to find out why some individuals are good remote viewers and others are not. In passing, the remote viewing experiment involving the submarine *Taurus* is also covered. Of most interest are the comments about the psychic Ingo Swann, who was tasked with developing a method to train remote viewers. According to May, he had a brilliant mind and worked 12 to 14 hours each day for years, but it is stressed that he was not a scientist and that the method he developed was fundamentally flawed. The main problem was that Swann was not blind to the target and provided feedback to the remote viewers during training sessions: "Assuming no psychic ability whatsoever, a person could arrive at the correct site via clever responses, conscious or unconscious" (pp. 140–141). May also claims that Swann instilled an anti-science attitude in his trainees, which contributed to the creation of a chasm between the researchers and the remote viewers at Ft. Meade.

Naturally the eventual closure of the Star Gate program in 1995 is also covered. May has expressed his views about this before (May, 1996), but he provides some additional information about what occurred behind the scenes. For more than a decade after the closure he and McMoneagle tried to start a new program—all their efforts were in vain. Nevertheless, it is still rumored that an active remote viewing program exists (e.g., Margolis, 2013, pp. 108–110).

So far, this review has barely touched on psi research in the Soviet Union, despite the fact that the sections concerning this are presumably of most interest. The claims that these sections contain are much harder to assess and are bound to exceed boggle thresholds, although the authors for their part seem to take most of the claims at face value. Due to the frustrating lack of details it is difficult to grasp the scope of psi research after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but it seems as if in the 1990s, the focus was on applied psi rather than research.

Some of the stranger claims that reached the U.S. concerned psychotronic generators—hardware devices, often with nothing under the casing that ostensibly utilized psychic energy. In the Soviet Union dozens were constructed but most of them never worked. That said, according to Major General Nikolai Sham, the few that did ". . . were, and still remain, utterly unique designs that were frequently ahead of

their time and which created the foundation for future technologies” (p. x). May, however, claims that Sham told him that although he had funded 40 different institutes specifically to develop psychotronic weapons they just could not get them to work. When the Cold War ended development of psychotronic weapons was discontinued.

Psychics were, however, still used, but according to the Russians their intelligence agencies only sporadically consulted psychics and primarily in crime investigations or counter-espionage operations. The authors note: “The KGB held two opposing views of psychics at the same time: Officially, the KGB prosecuted them. Unofficially, they secretly used them” (p. 281). Several examples are given, including some recollections by the psychic Tofik Dadashev (concerning him, see Gris & Dick, 1978). The Russians also, allegedly, had psychics on Dickson Island in the Kara Sea who “. . . studied the American military satellites by means of remote viewing, even to the details of their designs” (p. 170).

Major General Boris Ratnikov and Major General Georgii Rogozin consulted psychics concerning threats to Boris Yeltsin. On some occasions Ratnikov even changed Yeltsin’s schedule based on information from psychics. They also used psychics to protect important politicians from psychic influence and mind reading, but no details are given. Ratnikov relates that a psychic informed him that Yuri Skokov, Secretary of the State Security Council, was subject to psychic influence during his and Yeltsin’s visit in the U.S. in 1992: “Naturally, we tried to protect Skokov from this psychic influence and to block the leak of information through extrasensory methods” (p. 189). Ratnikov clearly believed such things could occur and has previously claimed that psychics read former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s subconscious mind in 1999 (Smolchenko, 2007).

Equally mind-boggling is Lt. General Alexei Savin’s account about military unit 10003. Savin comes across as an exceptional man who after three near-death experiences in childhood became psychic. Friends in high places ensured that his extensive program, initiated in 1989, was well-supported. Initially his staff consisted of 10 people, but by the year 2000, it included more than 50 people. Groups of psychics were trained (unfortunately no details are given about their training) and applied their abilities in a variety of ways. My impression is however that Savin would agree with Major General Nikolai Sham: “But most importantly, unique techniques of developing extraordinary human abilities and qualitatively increasing intellectual and spiritual levels were developed and carefully tested in practice” (p. xi). The program remained active until 2004.

In conclusion, it should be admitted that the book lacks an index, is somewhat poorly organized, and references are rarely given. Parapsychologists know where to search for more detailed information, but the book is clearly aimed at laymen. They would likely also appreciate a timeline with key events. Whether the true stories have really been provided can be disputed, but it is an interesting book. Most of the information concerning the Star Gate program is already in the open literature (e.g., May, 2014), but especially May’s recollections provide some new glimpses behind the scenes. The authors also managed to get the Russians to share some new thought-provoking information that would fit well in a science fiction novel.

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