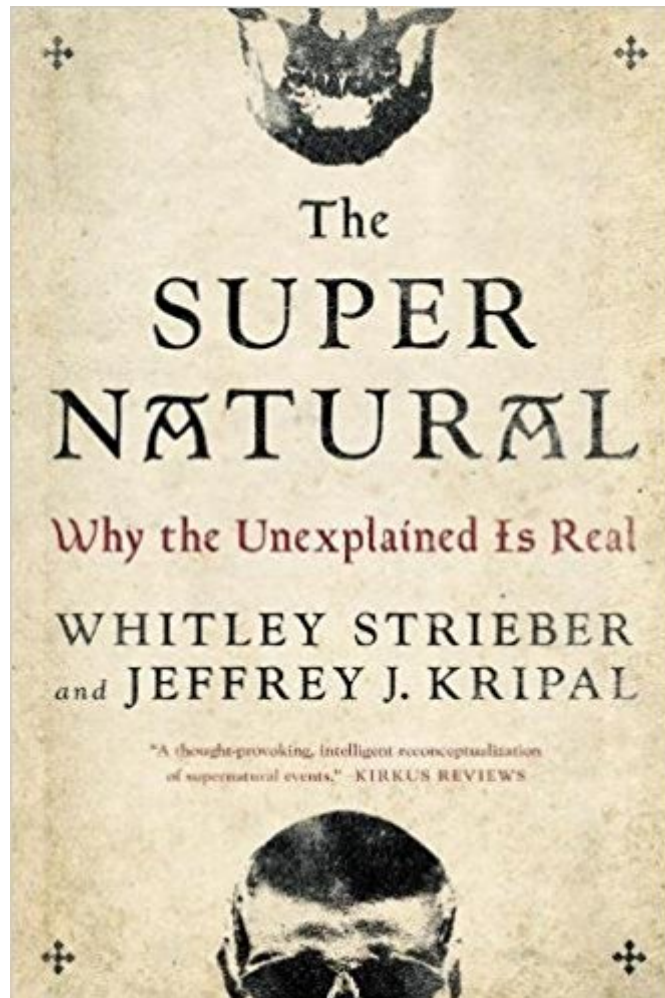




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# The Super Natural: Why The Unexplained Is Real



## Synopsis

Two of today's maverick authors on anomalous experience present a perception-altering and intellectually thrilling analysis of why the paranormal is real, but radically different from what is conventionally understood. Whitley Strieber (Communion) and Jeffrey J. Kripal (J. Newton Rayzor professor of religion at Rice University) team up on this unprecedented and intellectually vibrant new framing of inexplicable events and experiences. Rather than merely document the anomalous, these authors--one the man who popularized alien abduction and the other a renowned scholar and "renegade advocate for including the paranormal in religious studies" (The New York Times)--deliver a fast-paced and exhilarating study of why the supernatural is neither fantasy nor fiction but a vital and authentic aspect of life. Their suggestion? That all kinds of "impossible" things, from extra-dimensional beings to bilocation to bumps in the night, are not impossible at all: rather, they are a part of our natural world. But this natural world is immeasurably more weird, more wonderful, and probably more populated than we have so far imagined with our current categories and cultures, which are what really make these things seem "impossible." The Supernatural considers that the natural world is actually a "super natural world"--and all we have to do to see this is to change the lenses through which we are looking at it and the languages through which we are presently limiting it. In short: The extraordinary exists if we know how to look at and think about it. From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

“A cohesive reframing of the ‘œpantheon of the unknown’ A thought-provoking, intelligent reconceptualization of supernatural events. Kirkus Reviews “This book is a dream come true. It has taken thirty years for the most articulate of abductees to be taken seriously by a senior academic. This dialogue between the famous abductee and the historian of religions is the first major step in ufology since Jacques Vallee’s writings of the 1990s. Whitley Strieber’s intelligence and honesty compel one to take his experiences seriously, though they may sweep the philosophical ground from under our feet. In taking up the challenge, Jeffrey Kripal avoids the simplistic reactions of both skeptic and true believer. Instead of pretending to have the answers, he asks mind-bending questions, whose very asking is an act of self-transformation. Their conversation sets off sparks that should rekindle the search after ‘rejected knowledge’ and integrate it with the great paradigm change of our time: the end of materialism.” --Joscelyn Godwin, Colgate University “Requires the reader to avoid the first great pitfall of thinking that ‘œskepticism and belief are the only two options’ very well written, surprisingly light, and fast-paced They don’t pretend to have answers, but we get the feeling the right questions lie in this direction. Every serious forteran needs to read it.” •Bob Rickard, Fortean Times “If reading The Super Natural doesn’t make your hair stand straight up, you need to read it again. This book is at once disturbing and disorienting, fascinating and lucid. Its ‘œnew vision of the unexplained’ dives headfirst into all sorts of strange but true encounters, from ravishing alien goddesses to loathsome blue gremlins. While this domain of human experience remains strictly taboo, it doesn’t stop hundreds of thousands of ordinary people from continuing to report bizarre encounters with we know not what. This remarkable book does not attempt to explain what is going on. But it does crack open your head long enough to provide a new perspective.” •Dean Radin, Chief Scientist, Institute of Noetic Sciences and author of Supernormal; Entangled Minds; and The Conscious Universe “Something is happening here, and we’re not sure what it is, but Kripal and Strieber have a clue: if there are aliens among us, they are ourselves, and we seem eager to make contact. This is a brilliant, provocative, and gripping new inquiry into the mysteries of time, space, and the human -- and not so human -- mind. Absolutely captivating; one could even say I was abducted...” •Gary Lachman, author of The Secret Teachers of the Western World “A modern day descent into the rabbit hole, The Super Natural will blow your mind wide open, overturn beliefs about reality and the imagination, and challenge preconceived notions about life, death, and what falls in-between. Erudite, illuminating, and thoroughly exciting (not to mention

quite funny at times), Strieber and Kripal's collaboration takes a serious look at what many would consider an unserious subject and have written the most thought-provoking and important book on the essence and nature of unexplained phenomena in more than forty years.

• Gary Jansen, author of *Holy Ghosts* "Fascination with the UFO phenomenon and with its extreme forms found in abduction reports has triggered passionate debates about the nature of the manifestations, the reliability of human testimony, and the unavoidable parallels with initiatory states and certain mystical visions. Yet the ambiguity of the relationship with the creatures involved has remained unresolved. The controversy has reactivated fundamental debates about the role of archetypes, the power of the unconscious, and the transcendental meaning of sex. A novel way to approach the problem emerges in this exceptional book -- the product of a dialogue between an articulate experimenter and an erudite historian of religions. In the process we discover that the experimenter is also something of a historian, and the historian confesses he has not been untouched by the experience...What is at stake is nothing less than the nature of our reality, and our ability as humans to grasp levels of perception that are at once so dangerous and so sublime.

• Jacques Vallee, author of *Passport to Magonia*, *Forbidden Science*, and *Wonders in the Sky* "Practically anything goes at the American Academy of Religion's annual conference...What was almost impossible to find, at this orgy of intellectual curiosities, was discussion of the paranormal: ESP, premonitions, psychic powers, alien abduction and the like. This is a conference concerned with all sorts of supernatural and metaphysical claims....So why nothing about, say, mental telepathy? That is the question posed by Jeffrey J. Kripal, a professor of religion at Rice University in Houston and a renegade advocate for including the paranormal in religious studies." *The New York Times* "No matter your beliefs, Strieber's writing has impact." *Library Journal*

WHITLEY STRIEBER is one of today's most influential and bestselling authors of both science fiction and extraordinary fact. He is best known for his groundbreaking memoir *Communion*, which popularized the alien-abduction thesis, as well as his many bestselling novels, such as *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger*. These and other of Strieber's books have formed the basis for many popular movies, including *The Day After Tomorrow*. JEFFREY J. KRIPAL is the J. Newton Rayzor professor of religion at Rice University. He is the author of six books, including *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion*, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*, and *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal*. From the Hardcover edition.

This book is about a shamanic postmodern tantra of alien communion. I loved this book and I was a little disappointed toward the end as well. Basically this book alternates chapters by Whitley Strieber and Jeffery Kripal riffing/reflecting on each other's thoughts. The subject is primarily Alien contact experiences. Strieber talks mostly of his own experiences, the development of his thought on the experiences and how he relates this to Kripal's concerns. Kripal brings different frames that he thinks will enhance the conversation. Many of these frames are implicitly used by Whitley and other writers of anomalous experiences but often implicitly, by making them explicit we gain greater control over the kind of story we make, the kind of study we undertake. Of the multiple frames Kripal introduced I found the following six most useful:

**Comparison** "if we collect enough seemingly anecdotal or anomalous experiences from different times and places and place them together on a fair comparative table, we can quickly see that these reports are neither anecdotal nor anomalous. We can see that they are actually common occurrences in the species. They are part of our world. They are *ö*natural, *ö* as we say, even if each of them is also rare with respect to any particular individual, and all of them are *ö*super, *ö* that is, beyond how we presently understand how this natural world works.

**Phenomenology**: This is basically the first step anyone takes when getting interested in any anomalous/rare experiences, search through history and see how common it is, what variations there are. Though this is a complex philosophical movement, in this context it is simply the practice of engaging/inquiring with experience as it *ö*appears *ö* and temporarily putting aside how it might relate to the *ö*objective world. As Whitney says: *ö*"I am reporting a perception, not making a claim, and there is a world of difference between those two approaches.

**Historical contextualization**: Kripal argues for the usefulness of contextualizing anomalous experiences while arguing against a prevalent tendency in the academy to using historical contextualization to explain away the possible universal significance of all meanings/truths. Kripal makes a glib and amusing reflection: *ö*"I do not think it is too much of a simplification to suggest that the entire history of religions can be summed up this way: strange super beings from the sky come down to interact with human beings, provide them with cultural, technological, legal, and ethical knowledge, guide them, scare the crap out of them, demand their submission and obedience, have sex with them (often forcefully), and generally

terrorize, awe, baffle, inspire, and use them. He further argues against reducing myths to misunderstood science or apparently advanced science [UFO] to simply older myths. Instead we should keep the tension between these two reductive tendencies and allow each poll to inform, enrich and challenge our stories.

**Hermeneutics (interpretation):** He focuses mostly of two aspects of hermeneutics, its suspicious enactments which look for hidden meanings and the feedback loop of understanding between subject who understands and the objects of understanding. This loop is not stable but endlessly influencing and changing each poll.

"I am thinking of films like *The Never ending Story*(1984), *Stranger than Fiction*(2006), and the *Adjustment Bureau* (2011) the story revolves around a protagonist engaging his own life as a fictional story being written either in this world or in another, seemingly by someone else. As he reads and interprets the text of his life, however, he discovers that its story or plot changes. He discovers the circle or loop of hermeneutics. He discovers that as he engages his cultural script as text creatively and critically he his rereading and rewriting himself. He is changing the story.

He also spends a lot of time talking about the origin of the idea of the imaginal [both as symbolic and empirical forms). This is very interesting but a little too complex to talk/quote about in a review.

**Erotics:** Kripal argues for the centrality of the erotic in this study, the erotic from Plato's Eros, to Freud's Libido to Tantra's energies and transformations. Here he recounts his own interesting experiences in India with the goddess Kali. This also lays a bridge for his sympathetic reading of Whitley Strieber. "What was Whitley Strieber's crime? What did he do that was so wrong?..Not only did he speak s secrets in public, but he spoke reverently and fearfully of a divine presence that was feminine, that broke and rode him like a horse by doing so, he spoke of a presence at the very heart of the unconscious of the religious West, a presence that has been repressed and denied for three millennia. He spoke of Her.

**Traumatic secret:** Here he writes about how trauma can often be a breaking open into both madness or/and transcendence. Near death experiences, traumatic abuse, violent accidents and alien encounters are often described by people as moments of breakage from a social/egoic trace into greater numinous[awe full reality] space.

"It is only a thought. I do not know. I want to be very humble here and stress the complexities. Still, here is the thought. If the ego is ready to let go, then it will be more likely to experience an encounter wit the sacred Alien or Other as extremely positive, as redemptive, as ecstatic. If, on the other hand, the ego is not ready to let go of itself, then it will be more likely to experience an encounter with the sacred as extremely negative, as terrifying, as

destructive. My only criticisms of the book are some of its looseness with terms toward the end. There is a lot of imprecision in the use of the word mystical. All anomalous experiences get packed into the tent of mystical experiences at times which is not helpful. Whitley's experiences are not the same as Meister Eckhart's of the Godhead. I understand how interpretively they may be using similar devices [Hermeneutics] but the phenomena they talk about is vastly different in my opinion. Also mystical practices are concerned with stable changes of states and character, while altered states are not necessarily so concerned. There is some overlap but I think it has to be spelled out much more clearly to be knowledge enhancing and not just mudding the water. Also some of the riffs on the physical sciences and quantum physics are cringe worthy. I think the perspective is important but just like Kripal brought a sophisticated humanities perspective, you need a sympathetic scientist [there are a few] to really get any substantive insights from the scientific viewpoint. Anyway, I only talked about some of the frames that are explored much more in depth in the book. For anyone with an interest in UFOs, paranormal studies, or religious studies this is highly recommended. If you don't have an interest in any of these three why did you read this review?

During the winter of 1973/74, I was presented with a forced introduction to the UFO phenomenon that would create a life-long interest in this subject. This forced introduction was while I was a First Lieutenant in the 90th Strategic Missile Wing, Strategic Air Command, F.E. Warren AFB, Cheyenne, Wyoming. The SAC base was heavily involved with UFO incidents during that time period and I was a direct witness to these events. The UFO phenomenon has been a special interest, but not an obsession, since that winter long ago. Many books on the subject have been purchased and read, and many old colleagues have been spoken to over the years. I feel that I do have some knowledge of this subject. This book, the Super Natural by Whitley Strieber and Jeffrey Kripal, with Mr. Strieber being a world famous "Abductee" with many books to his name, is a new and very different interpretation of the age old phenomenon of the UFO and the existence of the extraterrestrial or the interdimensional being. This book is not an easy read by any means and in many places one must, at times, re read a paragraph. I did find the book very interesting. While I firmly believe, from what I have personally witnessed, read about, and through long discussions with fellow USAF officers from the old days, that the UFO and its occupants are physical. They may be extremely advanced to compared to us, but their ships are nuts and bolts, so to speak, and the creatures within them, are physical beings. Throughout the book, the idea that the creatures (extraterrestrials), or inter dimensional beings are more, much more, is a concept that is difficult to get your hands around. The

two authors speak of the brain, the mind, even the soul, as interacting and interconnected to the (saucer) pursuit of the truth. In that it is much more than physical. How much of the timeless UFO Phenomenon is inside our brain, mind, and our soul? Not that the UFO and all that is encompassed in that word, is an illusion. It is not an illusion in any sense of the word. But something far different and a different reality that we do not understand. This is the question that this book attempts to probe and gives a new perspective to the entire question of life in our universe. While I may not agree with small portions of their theories and their perspective outlined in their book, I recommend that everyone should read it, and that the reader attempt to open his mind to a far different approach to the study of the craft, the occupants, and the abductions and what it may all mean for all of us.

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