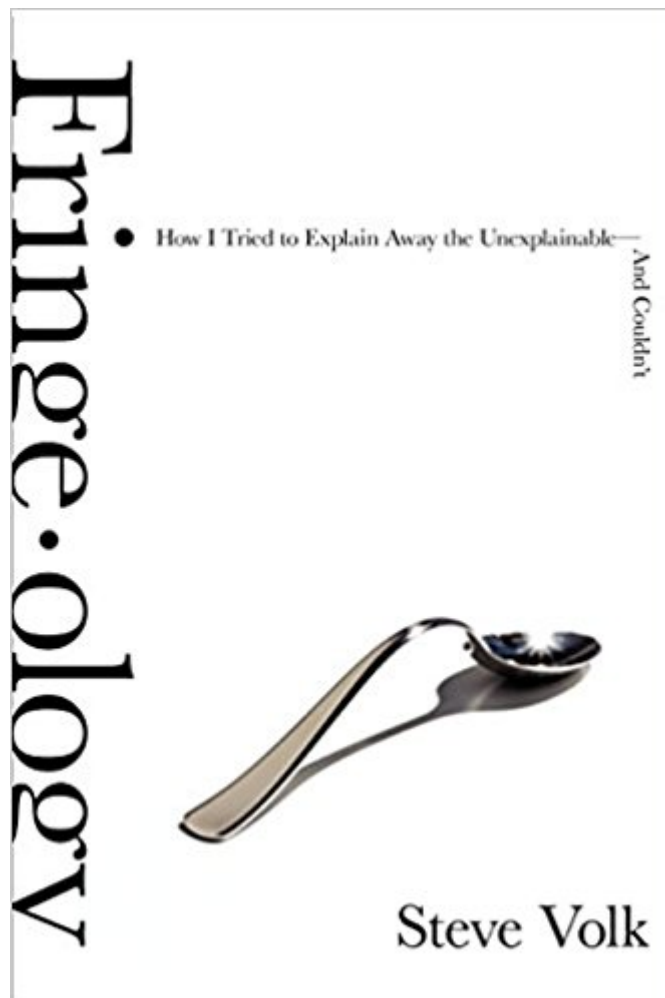




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Fringe-ology: How I Tried To Explain Away The Unexplainable-And Couldn't



Synopsis

• Fringe-Ology brings a poet's eye to the frayed edges between the known and unknown, belief and skepticism. A dive into the paranormal even a hardcore skeptic like myself can enjoy. • Mat Johnson, author of Pym Takes a strange and unsettling trip into the heart of the paranormal universe as journalist Steve Volk tries to answer some of the most fundamental questions at the heart of human existence. Fringe-ology will appeal to anyone curious but cautious about reports of paranormal experiences, psychic phenomena, and other unexplainable events • anyone who has ever wondered about the existence of an afterlife, intelligent life on other planets, or the limits of extrasensory perception. For fans of Fringe, Mythbusters, Medium, Heroes, Nova, and Lost, Volk's scintillating journey into mystery illuminates the furthest boundaries of possibility and wonder.

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Customer Reviews

• A sharply written, intelligently argued book that should appeal equally to believers and skeptics. • (Booklist)

Paranormal claims don't traditionally sit well with reporters, but journalist Steve Volk decided to focus his tenacity on a new beat: a NASA astronaut-turned-mystic, a world-famous psychologist who taught us about dying and decided death may not exist at all, and scientists attempting to verify what mystics have been reporting for millennia. From his journey into the bizarre, Volk discovers

that the "fringe" story strikes at the core of what it means to be human.

Steve Volk is a professional journalist, and that is the perspective he writes from in Fringe-ology. Although this is an intellectual quest on his part, his personally engaging style of writing pulls you in from page one. I usually take my time reading books that I enjoy, because I like to savor them like a fine wine, not wanting them to end, yet like a romantic dinner, I can't help anticipating its direction. Fringe-ology was hard to put down for long, so I found myself re-reading several of my favorite chapters to stretch out the experience. The introduction alone would have been worth the price of the book. It's that good. Then there's the greater issue of the "Paranormal Taint", and the chapter on Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, or the effect that space travel has on Astronauts, lucid dreaming, the placebo effect and... I don't want to give too much away. Hint: there's more to the Paranormal Taint than you may think. Fringe-ology has the feel and integrity of Debra Blum's *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death*, except that Steve Volk covers a wider variety of phenomena and he approaches his subjects with a more personal touch. He has caught a little bit of flak because at certain points the reader starts to think that Steve is about to 'give in' and pronounce his belief in a supernatural cause underlying the topics he covers, only to have him continue on and give the skeptics their legitimate day in court. At one point I started to write out a list of insights that I found worth making note of, but I abandoned that because I was enjoying the book too much to turn it into a job assignment. This is an informative mind-candy joy of a read, not a textbook. The best metaphor that I can think of to describe Fringe-ology is that it's like reading a book length New York Times article / op-ed about the paranormal, with the honest information you would expect from a professional journalist, but with the personal engagement that you want from a novel. No axes to grind, no agenda's to fill, just pure intellectual inspiration. I have quite a library of wide-ranging books relating to the paranormal, spirituality, science, myths and religion. If I were to start loaning them out one by one to someone unfamiliar with these topics, I would begin with Fringe-ology. It's a level headed yet exciting place to start. Hands down, five stars. No question about it.

This kept my interest. I think the author did a good job investigating many kinds of paranormal claims. He also said to not confuse paranormal with supernatural. Paranormal means events or perceptions that can't be explained scientifically. Supernatural involves things beyond the known universe. He believes that, for the most part, scientists and the like simply refuse to believe that there is any merit to paranormal claims. As an example, he told someone about a ghost or

poltergeist that really seemed to not be pipes in the wall (or whatever) making noise, and that particular someone simply said that it has to be pipes or whatever because it couldn't possibly be anything unexplainable. The author believes that some things are currently unexplainable and we shouldn't be so quick to label every strange occurrence as having a scientific explanation. Maybe there are things going on that we don't understand or can't explain. That is his conclusion and he covers a lot of ground to get there. However, he doesn't cast a wide net in the different investigations of the various subjects. For example, in his investigation of UFOs he examines one case. He talks to a lot of people about that case but again, it's just one case. And for his ghost investigation he follows a ghost hunter around for a little while. Also he was personally involved with a ghost case (involving his own house) and he did talk to others who experienced that phenomenon, including later residents of the home. But it's not a thorough ghost investigation. That being said I still think he did a good job. It's not like he did a sparse or slipshod job in his investigations. And this is an engrossing read. An interesting tidbit I got from the book is that some people do seem to have ESP but that it is not accurate enough or consistent enough to be practical. At least not yet.

Providing examples of happenings in life whose realities cannot really be denied, the author provides a truly intelligent and open approach of pursuing possible explanations from science and religion. The conclusion being that things continue to happen in the world that are not currently completely explained by science or religion. As we all continue the pursuit of answers, can we be civil, respectful and seek the best for each other. I happen to be one of the minority whose experiences have lead me to conclude that science and religion are completely compatible. As time progresses, I fully expect the two seemingly different perspectives to ultimately become completely aligned. The examples of intelligent, scientific and enlightened individuals achieving a oneness with the universe are reflective of where I expect the end state of human existence and post human existence to converge. May we all have open and inquisitive minds and do the best we know how to make each other's experience in life better through our interactions. Truly an exceptional book - in my opinion.

Like -- I expect -- many other readers, I learned about this book from the Radiolab short episode "Wake Up and Dream" which is a nice introduction to lucid dreaming. It's one of my favorite episodes. In re-acquainting myself with the book recently, I was struck by how well Volk calls out the "science = religion" folks in a way very similar to what I have been hearing more recently from host

Adam Curry on the No Agenda show. Now, for the most part I am a "Dawkins atheist" but for people like me it's sometimes good to be reminded that it can be an intellectual trap -- "Shut up already: it's science!" One takeaway: there is no intellectual shame in saying "I don't know."

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