

When the Impossible Happens: Adventures in Non-Ordinary Reality **By Stanislav Grof**

Paradigm Busters- A Review by Renn Butler (2006)

Stan Grof's new book, "When the Impossible Happens," has become an instant transpersonal classic. The most personable and accessible of his many projects, I recommend this book enthusiastically to anyone interested in human consciousness, including the study of synchronicities, pre- and perinatal experiences, racial and collective memories, ESP and paranormal abilities, karma and reincarnation, the convergence of science and mysticism, and survival of consciousness after death.

Drawing upon fifty years of disciplined research into the extraordinary properties of the human psyche, Grof presents a series of representative experiences of himself, his colleagues, and his patients of powerful journeys in non-ordinary or holotropic ("moving toward wholeness") states of consciousness. The content of many of these experiences were then objectively verified afterward, often to incredible surprise. These included obstetric details from birth, experiences of the subject's mother during pregnancy, obscure episodes from the lives of parents and ancestors, unknowable details from past lives, minute physiological characteristics of various animal and plant species, arcane details of world mythologies of which the subject clearly had no prior knowledge, and many other examples. A number of these fit the criteria for later objective verification through hospital records or research libraries; that is, they have the credibility of paradigm busters. The sheer volume and quality of these remarkable documented experiences suggest a radical revisioning of the outmoded mechanistic and monistic vision of reality, and point instead toward a cosmos governed by higher intelligence, numinous meaning, and even sophisticated humor.

What makes this book so special is the depth of personal sharing. While Grof dutifully and carefully presented in previous books the implications of his many years of research, his career trajectory and perhaps the entire culture have finally reached a tipping point where the "anomalous" clinical facts can be openly shared with much more personal color, vivacity, and self-referencing irony. I felt I learned more about the inner flavor of Grof's own life from this book than from all his other writing combined, a life of exceptional quality, depth, and service to others. He describes his first LSD session in Prague in 1956 in which he was taken on a profoundly unexpected journey into cosmic consciousness, spontaneous spiritual experiences in the presence of his wife's guru, Swami Muktananda, his involvement in the making of the movie *Brainstorm*, inspired umbanda ceremonies, UFO's in the Amazon, and incredible terrifying experiments in astral projection.

He recalls breakthrough LSD sessions and celebratory vodka parties with Russian colleagues in '60's Leningrad, earthy centenarian shamans at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, psychedelic toads in the Arizona desert, past lives spent in Ukranian monasteries and ancient Egypt, his auspicious yet doomed fairytale wedding in Iceland, life-changing contact with Absolute Consciousness, and his frustrated search for the infamous Mayan Crystal Skull. Grof covers this rich experiential territory with the disciplined curiosity of a seasoned connoisseur. Here are vivid psychedelic adventures on every continent - magnificent sunsets at Ayers Rock in Australia, death-rebirth sequences in pre-Columbian sites in Mexico, gorgeous psychedelic sunrises off the coast of Rio de Janeiro. He describes influential friendships and

collaborations with his partner Christina, astrologer Richard Tarnas, and mythologist Joseph Campbell, meetings with archetypal figures such as Czech Republic President Václav Havel, Sai Baba, Mother Teresa, and Carl Sagan, and star-studded conferences of the International Transpersonal Association held on every continent. Grof remembers with us a lifetime of exquisite culinary feasts, spectacular natural panoramas, forays into the world's great art museums, and sampling of exotic psychoactive compounds from the planet's rich pharmacopoeia.

Above all, he describes the dramatic healing effects of inner self-exploration, both with psychedelics and with comparable non-drug techniques such as Holotropic Breathwork. Deep and systematic exploration of this type has resulted consistently in emotional and psychosomatic healing, spiritual awakening, and spontaneous emergence of positive ecological and humanitarian values. This type of transformation in sufficient numbers, Grof convincingly asserts, may be an important missing ingredient enhancing our species' chances for survival.