



The Element Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mind, Body, Spirit and Earth; The Unexplained Psychic Powers

Books Reviewed:

[The Element Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mind, Body, Spirit and Earth](#) [1]

Books Reviewed:

[The Unexplained Psychic Powers](#) [2]

Issue:

[111](#) [3]

Reviewer:

[Nicholas Tucker](#) [4]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

2

Element's bright and breezy illustrated encyclopedia underwrites every wacky idea that has irritated rationalists since time began. For example, 'If you're frightened of spiders, it might be because, in one of your past lives, you were a fly!' Regular exclamation marks and the use of phrases like 'appear to', 'could be', or 'some cultures believe' make a small concession to doubters, but on the whole scepticism is in short supply. A smudgy photograph on page 21 is captioned 'the two people in the picture appear to be combining their mind power to raise the girl's body off the ground.' Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle might not have been taken in by that one.

The end result offers an interesting challenge to those who, unlike the author, do not live in a spiritual community themselves. The book certainly discusses issues that have enlivened many a playground or saloon bar debate. But its refusal to consider well-known physiological explanations for phenomena like astral flying or near-death experiences is surely misleading, together with repeated warnings against harming children by throwing cold, rational water too quickly on some of their delusions. Yet what else is a responsible adult expected to do when faced by questions about reading tea leaves or contacting one's Guardian Angel for a cosy chat ('Just believe it!')? A sceptics' encyclopedia for children, questioning all the assumptions of this volume, would make an excellent counter-balance, though it would probably not be nearly as popular.

Colin Wilson's **The Unexplained Psychic Powers** makes the Element Encyclopedia seem positively restrained. A celebration of general hocus pocus plus some obvious trickery, this is a very odd and occasionally rather tacky publication. Beautifully illustrated as always, but with pictures which can seem tasteless for a variety of reasons, here is another book which could well prove more popular with children than with responsible adults.

Running Order:

11

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- [1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-element-illustrated-encyclopedia-of-mind-body-spirit-and-earth>
- [2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-unexplained-psychic-powers>
- [3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/111>
- [4] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/nicholas-tucker>