

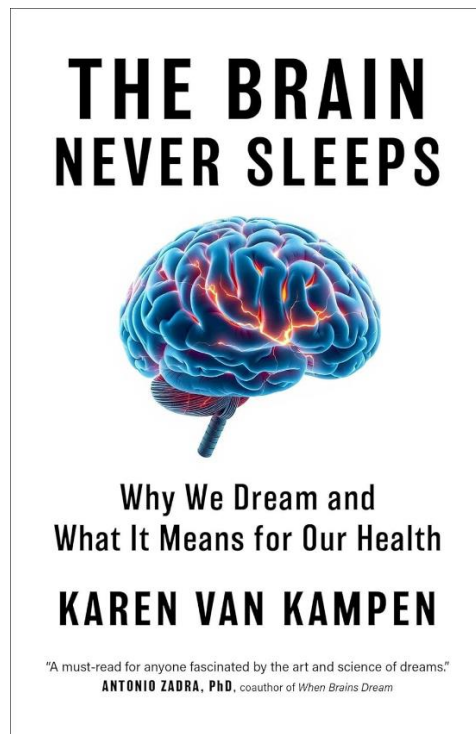
Mark Blagrove, Swansea University

Review of *The Brain Never Sleeps:*

Why We Dream and What it Means for our Health

by Karen van Kampen (publisher Simon and Schuster, March 2026)

For publishing in Dream Time, magazine of the International Association for the Study of Dreams, Spring 2026 issue.



This is a wonderful, captivating, wide-ranging and very original book. It is a clear description of all aspects of research into dreaming and the experience of dreams. It ranges from what is happening in the brain when we dream, to dream content, types of dreams, dream analysis, nightmares, psychoanalysis, disorders of sleep and dreaming, and the technology now being used to alter our dreams. And the debates on whether dreaming has a function, and how we can even experiment to test these theories, are also explained well. As a journalist and science writer the author of course writes beautifully, all is clear, no redundancies, and even highly technical scientific methods are described so that the average reader will understand and appreciate how the science is done. But as well as being a writer the author worked in her

physician father's sleep lab for many years, and so has a lifelong interest in the subject, her fascination with all areas of subject shines through in the book.

There is so much to the book, that I am doing a list! 19th century dream researchers; Freud, Jung; early twentieth century theories and experimenters; physiology, EEG and neuroscience of dreams; parasomnias, including REM behavior disorder, sleep walking, and sleep sex; types of thinking in dreams, including lucidity; self-perception and insight; Covid and dreams telling us about our health and wellbeing; 'Dreams reveal what matters most to us and what remains unsettled in our lives.' Recurrent dreams; Hall and the coding of dream content; the recording of dream series in journals and the scientific and personal uses of these dream series; rumination and nightmares; worries, and dreams that heal and repair; ancient and cross cultural dreams; threat simulation theory and why in dreams do we construct a simulation of the world?; have we evolved to dream?; effects of pregnancy and divorce; emotions in dreams; 9/11 and the central image; episodic memories in dreams; sleep lab studies on memory; the dream-lag; targeted memory reactivation; big dreams and little dreams; clinical use of anaesthesia dreams; Impactful dreams; dream interpretation using AI and apps; therapy and group methods of interpreting dream; dreams and art, including surrealism; the author discussing her dream and having it painted in a dream salon; using technology to alter dreams for research, creativity and wellbeing. The book then finishes with exercises and tools for changing and using one's dreams for insight and creativity.

Even people with a lifelong interest or work in this field will benefit from the breadth of the book. But for those experts, and for the general reader, one additional feature makes the book unique and extremely valuable. There are captivating and enlightening interviews with the major dream researchers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many of these people I have known or knew for years, but the interviews of how and why they became sleep and dream researchers, and details of what they were doing when growing up, was eye-opening for me. And some of the details, such as the family life of Eugene Aserinsky, the co-discoverer of REM sleep with Nathaniel Kleitman, are very poignant. Some of the people who the author interviewed were: Hobson, Stickgold, Eugene Aserinsky's son, Solms, Zadra, Domhoff, Schredl, Bulkeley, Cartwright, Nielsen, Barrett, Wegner, Hartmann, Walker, Samson, Revonsuo, Stenstrom, Stickgold, Paller, Sikka, Blagrove, Konkoly, Baird, and Haar. Much of what she reports about their backgrounds, life experiences and motivations has not been published before, and these fascinating details add so much to such a thorough book.

Reading this bestselling book it is clear that Karen van Kampen has not just immersed herself in all areas of the research and practice in this field, but has engaged in long conversations across many years with those researchers and practitioners. The book is thus perfect in explaining where the field of dream research is now, it is completely up-to-date for 2026, and also how at theoretical, experimental and personal levels the field has developed over more than 100 years.