

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SO LONG AS YOU'VE GOT YOUR ELF: DEATH, DMT AND DISCARNATE ENTITIES

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This chapter concerns both the fruits of science—parapsychology, ethnobotany, psychology—and what we could call the foamy custard of FOLklore, Anthropology and MYthology, CUltural STudies And Related Disciplines. As a parapsychologist by training with a focus on ontology, I will discuss in this chapter elves, pixies, fairies and other “little people” collectively here referred to as “daimonic”.

Andrew Lang—anthropologist, psychical researcher and one-time President of the Society for Psychical Research—collected, collated and published folkloric accounts of the little people in a dozen books between 1889 and 1910. He pored over many accounts of different cultures from Australia to his native Scotland, and although he refused to believe elves existed in and of themselves, he did associate them with phantasms of the dead, particularly with poltergeist phenomena, and thereby he associated fairyland with Hades. Picking up where Lang left off, Evans-Wentz was the next to do the dance around the fairy ring, and in 1911 he published his *magnum opus* study on *The fairy-faith in Celtic countries*. Wentz documented an oral history of the little people across the British Isles and Brittany and discovered that the traditional informants would align the elves with spirits of the dead, although Evans-Wentz himself concluded that they were probably fourth-dimensional beings, existing in what mathematicians had earlier called hyperspace. He also speculated, like Lang, that this dimension was most likely actually connected to the realm of the dead:

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It is mathematically possible to conceive fourth-dimensional beings, and if they exist it would be impossible in a third-dimensional plane to see them as they really are. Hence the ordinary apparition is non-real as a form, whereas the beings, which wholly sane and reliable seers claim to see when exercising seership of the highest kind, may be as real to themselves and to the seers as human beings are to us here in the third-dimensional world when we exercise normal vision.²

Furthermore, “Fairyland exists as a supernormal state of consciousness which men and women may enter temporarily in dreams, trances or in various ecstatic conditions, or for an indefinite period at death”,³—a kind of permanent ecstatic condition. This raises two concerns: the importance of altered states of consciousness in accessing fairyland (be that Hades or hyperspace), and fairyland as an intermediate place that souls of the dead pass through.

Fast-forwarding a few decades, the notion of UFOs becomes prevalent on the cultural landscape. Although sporadic reports had been surfacing since the turn of the century, UFOs became popular in the 1940s, and by 1947 a poll revealed that eighty-seven per cent of the UK population had heard of UFOs. Thereafter, the UFO phenomenon quickly developed its own cultural cosmology. By the nineteen-sixties the UFO and alien abduction phenomena were becoming quite rampant in many ways, which led Jacques Vallée to make his classic folkloric comparison and draw persisting parallels between aliens and elves. With the publication of *Passport to Mangonia* (1969), Vallée turned his back on his earlier ideas about UFOs being extra-terrestrials and speculated that aliens could easily be multidimensional, thereby supporting Evans-Wentz’ concept of fairyland existing in hyperspace. Furthermore he is credited as being the first to suggest that the aliens themselves were a kind of technologised version of fairies for the twentieth century.⁴ Vallée formed this fusion of elves and aliens by considering the similarities between them: they are small humanoids with big black eyes, they appear to exist outside of space and time, and they both engage in abduction activity, supposedly for interspecies breeding programmes. Reports of alien abductions increased in later years, popularised partly by the apparently abducted horror writer Whitley Strieber (1987), who also helped spread new memetic developments of the aliens, such as the increasing encounters with insectoid aliens, and praying mantises in particular. Strieber also helped popularise the now classic small grey somewhat elfin-like aliens, albeit

² Evans-Wentz: 482.

³ Evans-Wentz: 382.

⁴ See Kripal 2010: 142-197.

with a very cartoonlike appearance on occasion, and while this may not have been very funny for Strieber at the time, it became a laughing point for his critics in many ways.⁵ But the cartoon-like nature of Strieber's greys later became less comical in the light of other developments at the time, because from the 1960s onwards psychedelics appeared on the cultural scene, and one substance in particular, DMT (although this remained much more underground than other psychedelics until the turn of the millennium and was quite an obscure latecomer to the scene).

Known technically as *N,N*, Dimethyltryptamine, the indole alkaloid DMT, as it is more commonly known, is a naturally occurring compound and is found in many plants. It is usually extracted from plants for human use, but it is also found in many animals, particularly mammals and even humans. Curiously it is not found in the fungus kingdom, but then some mushrooms have their own psychedelic version of DMT called psilocin (actually 4-Hydroxy-*Dimethyltryptamine*). We all have DMT in us, located in our cerebrospinal fluid and in our blood, and it is also likely that it occurs naturally in people's brains.⁶ It is an extremely psychedelic substance, most effective through smoking (it is not effective if eaten as stomach enzymes denature it). Smoking produces a very intense, short-acting, ten-minute experience beginning essentially with the exhalation of the first lungful. In Peter Meyer's 1992 article: "Apparent communication with discarnate entities induced by DMT", a few accounts are given of people's experiences. He suggests that there are a number of different levels to fathom, depending on the depth of experience. It starts off at level one: threshold experience, interior flowing of energy and consciousness; then level two: vivid, brightly coloured geometric visual patterns which are basically two-dimensional but they may pulse. Then the transitional phase that follows the geometry is a tunnel or breakthrough experience and a passage through to an entrance into another world. At level three, once one goes through the passageway, there is three-dimensional or higher space—echoing Evans-Wentz' notion of hyperspace again—possible contact with entities, and a sense of being in an objective space and of meeting intelligent, communicating entities. Finally, after that, is the white light.

To give examples of the kinds of experiences people have, there are some classic accounts in a paper by Timothy Leary written in 1966 called *Programmed communication during experiences with DMT* in which he reports of the experience of Alan Watts, a famous Zen philosopher who was also well known for talking a lot. Leary said that no matter what

⁵ On Strieber, comic books and the paranormal see Kripal 2011.

⁶ See Luke 2011a.

psychedelic substances he gave him he just carried on talking. However, he gave Watts DMT whilst Watts was telling a story and Watts was quiet for ten minutes. When he emerged he carried on telling the story from where he had left off as if nothing had happened—without missing a beat. Fortunately, Watts later described his experience, saying that it was exceedingly difficult to talk and that it was “like attempting to give a moment to moment description of one’s reactions while being fired out of the muzzle of an atomic cannon with neon byzantine barrelling”⁷—so he had a pretty intense geometric experience, somewhere in the region of Meyer’s level two, you might say.

Moving onto the next level, beyond the pure geometry, we arrive at the encounter with entities. One of the first researchers of DMT and the person who discovered its psychedelic properties in 1956 (even though it had been synthesised about twenty years earlier) was a Hungarian psychopharmacologist called Stephen Szára, who experimented with DMT on himself and had some extraordinary experiences. Shortly after, he started giving it to his medical colleagues and they reported all sorts of strange things, one of them announcing that, “the whole room is filled with spirits”, and another one saying “I feel exactly as if I were flying [...] in front of me are two quiet sunlit gods”.⁸ Indeed encounters with entities are one of the most common features of the DMT experience, and at least one DMT experiencer suggested that at a certain dosage you can no longer be an atheist because of these kind of encounters and experiences with numinous beings.⁹

This extraordinary molecule is now, of course, a scheduled substance, so research with it has been largely curtailed and it was not until the 1990s when Rick Strassman started reviving the research into DMT that any substantial phenomenological research was conducted. But before it became illegal, Timothy Leary, in his *Programmed communication during experiences with DMT* of 1966, developed a simple technique which he called “the experiential typewriter” in which you had the substance, you went into the experience and you were allowed to submerge yourself in it completely. But then every two minutes the sitter with you would say “where are you now?” and then you would quickly report on your phenomenological state—your state of consciousness. Here is Tim’s second experience with DMT, just two minutes in:

RALPH: “Tim, where are you now?”

⁷ Leary 1996: 84.

⁸ Strassman 2001: 46.

⁹ Strassman 2001: 230.

TIM: (thinks) Ralph's voice, stately, kind ... what? where? You? ... open eyes ... there squatting next to me are two magnificent insects ... skin burnished, glowing metallic, with hammered jewels inlaid ... richly costumed, they looked at me sweetly ... dear, radiant Venutian crickets ... one has a pad in his lap and is holding out a gem-encrusted box with undulating trapezoidal glowing sections ... questioning look ... incredible ... and next to him Mrs Diamond Cricket softly slides into a lattice-work of vibrations ... Dr Ruby-emerald Cricket smiles ...

RALPH: "Tim, where are you now?" ...¹⁰

So that was Tim's experience with these insectoid entities under the influence of DMT. As I said though, even with DMT having been criminalised in the 1970s, Rick Strassman braved apparent career suicide and started conducting research with it in the 1990s, having set up a medical programme. He had sixty volunteers go through the programme, administering a total of four hundred doses of DMT by injection (the fumerate, not the salt). Perhaps the most significant experiences that people reported within that research were encounters with what they usually called entities, beings, guides or helpers, although they were not always very helpful. The entities themselves would often appear as clowns, reptiles, mantises—for some reason praying mantises were quite common—bees, spiders, cacti or stick insects, but they also commonly appeared, as we might expect, as dwarves, elves, imps, or even angels, spirits, and gods. Sometimes they were just felt as a presence, and that presence was often supremely, and thankfully, powerful, loving and wise. However not all the experiences were pleasant, and not all entities loving and wise—for example one of Strassman's participants reported being anally raped by a reptile, which was a traumatic experience.

Terence McKenna announced that the fact that DMT induces these entity experiences so frequently is something to be remarked upon, and said, "You want contact? You want alien intelligences? All you gotta do is inhale and by the time you breathe out, you get elves, everybody does!"¹¹ Well not quite everybody. According to Strassman's more thorough research under laboratory controlled conditions, fifty percent of high dose participants had these kinds of invisible world phenomena where they would encounter alien beings of some description.¹² So that is fairly reliable scientifically—you can administer a substance in a certain dosage, and half your participants will have an encounter experience. So why has this phenomenon not been studied more?

¹⁰ Leary 1996: 92.

¹¹ McKenna: 76.

¹² See Strassman 2008: 73

One key thing that Strassman noted in the experiences of his participants, as already noted by McKenna, was that they tended to have a relationship to the alien abduction phenomena, in that sometimes they reported being operated on in a kind of classic alien abduction type scenario. They had things inserted into them in the presence of little alien-like entities, often elfin, or insectoid, such as mantises. Simultaneously, mantises became a sort of growing motif in the alien abduction literature, and one assumes that this was somewhat separate from the DMT literature of the time. For instance, Kottmeyer (1999) reports the increasing presence of praying mantises in alien abduction cases in the 1990s, which were dubbed the “greying” mantises as they appeared so often in people’s abduction experiences. In attempting to reconcile the apparent experience of aliens whilst on DMT, Terence McKenna suggested that, “We are so alienated that the self must disguise itself as an extra-terrestrial in order not to alarm us with the truly bizarre dimensions that it encompasses. When we can love the alien, then we will have begun to heal the psychic discontinuity that plagues us”.¹³ But he also said a lot of other things concerning DMT, such as suggesting, like Evans-Wentz, that elves were hyper-dimensional entities and that they were sentient and existed in their own right.

In support of all this, what I find interesting is that two of my colleagues had praying mantis encounters on DMT. For one of them it was their first time, and I assume they were naive because I knew how little they knew about the DMT and other psychedelic literature at that time. Certainly they were perplexed and surprised to meet a mantis and reported knowing nothing of the scant and obscure literature concerning them. Furthermore, one associate, under the influence of ayahuasca (which contains DMT), had an experience of being farmed for their emotions by praying mantis beings. Numerous questions remain about why the image or symbol of the mantis should appear, though limitations of space prevent further speculation in this chapter. It is necessary to correlate such theoretical considerations with personal experience, and in this matter I need to describe my own experiences with elves, because I believe that this research benefits from being experiential as well, and not just viewed from an academic distance.¹⁴ I have had various DMT experiences myself, and on my very first trip I knew little of the literature. However, I was very surprised to have an experience of what I can only describe as elves. They were very small humanoid characters about one or two feet high, sitting on top of my body—although I did not really have a body as such,

¹³ McKenna: 43.

¹⁴ See Luke 2011b.

more a space filled with light and energy resting where I had left behind my concept of my own corporality. There were smaller elves sitting on top of me shoving all the light into what I would call my solar plexus region. Immediately afterwards I realised the significance of the name “solar plexus”, because, obviously, where else would they shove the light? I was then quite intrigued to discover all the literature on DMT elves. In particular, years later, once I began reading the literature, I was astonished to come across a very similar account collected by Meyer in 1994: “I found myself once again [this is only their second DMT trip] in the company of the ‘elves,’ as the focus of their attention and ministrations, but they appeared much less colorful and altogether preoccupied with the task at hand, i.e., pouring a golden, viscous liquid through a network of long, inter-twining, transparent conduits which led into the middle of my abdomen ...”¹⁵ I continued to have a few more elf encounters on DMT, in which they often took on a very cartoon-like, clownish form, shape-shifting, never really keeping still, moving around and impossible to pin down. They seemed to be saying, “we’re here! Join us, come and play! Nothing is as it seems, beware, take care, but have no cares.”

In later experiences with ayahuasca, one in particular was very surprising. Ayahuasca is a jungle decoction used by the indigenes in the Amazon basin, the main ingredient of which is DMT, and it gives a somewhat (usually) milder four to six-hour DMT experience. During this experience I was sitting in a tent and several elves suddenly appeared in front of me. Now previously to this I had only closed-eye experiences of elves in some other dimension running around doing things, hyperspatially if you like. But here I was sitting there in a tent looking at the other people across from me, and the elves come into view between us, which was rather alarming, so alarming in fact that I turned around so I could not see them as I could not quite cope with them being there. But of course elves being elves, they ran around in front of me, so I had to keep looking away and they would keep running back around—I really did not know what to make of it. I had read lots about them by now and had even experienced them with my eyes closed—but this was just too much of an ontological challenge.

But it need not always be DMT that is the trigger for these elf experiences, because we know from the literature that people commonly have spontaneous elf encounters on other psychoactive substances. When I was on research in Brazil in 2010 I had the good fortune of going to a ceremony of the Guaraní indigenous people. It was supposedly a tobacco ceremony, but during the night things got very weird and I was not quite

¹⁵ Meyer (no pagination).

sure why. For instance, on the minibus coming back there was a little old woman in front of me peering over the top of the seats. She looked about three hundred years old, with a smile that extended all the way back to her ears, and she had very large, dark, almond-shaped eyes—in fact, they were completely jet black. She had an ancient wizened face, peering over the top of the seat and smiling at me, and I thought, “who is that old woman? And why does she keep smiling at me? ... I don’t remember her coming on the minibus with us to visit the Indians.”

It would have been extraordinary if she had just got on the minibus with us—and yet despite the fact she looked like she was three hundred years old her presence there was completely normal to me, and totally real. It was not until the next day when I was communicating with some of my colleagues who had also came along to this supposed tobacco ceremony, and we were trying to piece together why we had several hours of missing time as well as all the other strange things that had happened, that one of them said, “Did you see that little man running round the fire in the Indians’ hut last night? My friend and I saw him.” And I answered, “no, I don’t remember seeing him”. But both of them saw him so there was some kind of correlation at least, a smattering of objectivity as a “collective subjectivity” perhaps, as there were apparently multiple witnesses to this event. My colleague had also drawn a picture which she showed me, depicting her and her friend in the ceremonial hut, looking rather distressed, in the company of a little wizened old man. Upon seeing the picture of the little man, I suddenly remembered the little old woman on the minibus and I said, “well I didn’t see him, but I saw a little woman who looked just like him.” Later that day I eventually concluded (when I was trying to give a presentation at a conference and I could not actually read my lecture notes), that we’d been slipped some floripondio (*Brugmansia* genus), which is probably the only explanation for it—at least that was my evaluation of the situation. My point is that it need not always be DMT, it can be other substances that bring on the elves too. In fact drugs are not necessary for elves at all; they can and do occur spontaneously, but it may be that an altered state of consciousness itself is necessary and some people are more prone to achieving dissociative states. Furthermore, it may be that we all have DMT active in our brain and when we go into these spontaneous states of altered consciousness we’re actually activating our own endogenous DMT, so that DMT could be the neurochemical substrate of these spontaneous conducive-to-elf experiences.

Rick Strassman has suggested that DMT could be a mediator in all spontaneous mystical and paranormal experiences, be they out-of-body experiences, near death experiences or alien abduction experiences, but

also sleep paralysis. So we have a kind of death, alien, elf, entity, paranormal or mystical experience complex that is grouped around the use of DMT (or ayahuasca), either spontaneously or exogenously. There is also some evidence for a type of spontaneous shamanic initiation common to the whole near-death, alien abduction complex.¹⁶ However, although it is easy to melt the DMT event down into one uber-experience, there are certain nuances and differences in these phenomena which need to be addressed:¹⁷ the aliens themselves may actually be elves, but they are more intra-terrestrial than extra-terrestrial, or perhaps even trans-terrestrial—that is, they are not actually outside, but then inside is the wrong term as well. These experiences certainly occur “in” consciousness. As a scientist, trying to take an experimental approach to this research is pretty tricky, to say the least, so it probably also makes sense to take a mystical approach. The late great scientist Dr Albert Hoffman, the discoverer of LSD, wrote in his autobiography that science and mysticism should be natural allies, not enemies. So the best approach would probably be a combination of both.

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¹⁶ See Harvey-Wilson, McKenna, Ring 1989, 1992.

¹⁷ See Luke 2008.

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