



CONTACT THROUGH THE VEIL

by RICK STRASSMAN, M.D.

The following is a chapter from the forthcoming book DMT: The Spirit Molecule, to be published by PARK STREET PRESS in January 2001. The book can be ordered by calling (800) 246-8648 or by visiting <http://www.innertraditions.com>.

The material in this and the next chapter is the most unusual and difficult to understand. It is the weirdest and the easiest for me to skirt when people ask, "What did you find?"

When reviewing my bedside notes, I continually feel surprise in seeing how many of our volunteers "made contact" with "them," or other beings. At least half did so in one form or another. Research subjects used expressions like "entities," "beings," "aliens," "guides," and "helpers" to describe them. The "life-forms" looked like clowns, reptiles, mantises, bees, spiders, cacti, and stick figures. It still is startling to see my written records of comments like, "There were these beings," "I was being led," "They were on me fast." It's as if my mind refuses to accept what's there in black and white.

It may be that I have such a hard time with these stories because they challenge the prevailing world view, and my own. Our modern approach to reality relies upon waking consciousness, and its extensions of tools and instruments, as the only ways of knowing. If we can't see, hear, smell, taste, or touch things in our everyday state of mind, or using our technology-amplified senses, they're not real. Thus, these are "nonmaterial" beings.

In contrast, indigenous cultures are in regular contact with denizens of the invisible landscape and have no problems with straddling both worlds. Often they do this with the aid of psychedelic plants.

Many modern-day scientists possess an abiding faith in the spiritual. However, these same scientists are caught in a profound conflict between their personal and professional beliefs. What they say and what they feel may contradict each other profoundly. It is difficult to be "objective" about matters of the heart and spirit. Scientists may compartmentalize their faith and can't conceive of verifying or validating their spiritual intuition. In other cases they may water down

the nature of those beliefs to maintain some consistency with their intellectual understanding. Perhaps they simply ignore the presence of angels and demons in essential scriptures, or regard them as symbolic or as hallucinatory manifestations of an overactive religious imagination.

Lack of open dialogue about these issues makes it much more difficult to even imagine enlarging our view of the reality of nonmaterial realms using scientific methods. What would happen to the study of spirit realms if we could access them reliably using molecules like DMT?

In addition to questions regarding the existence of nonmaterial or spiritual worlds, we also must consider expanding the notion of what we may perceive in them. Can our spiritual and religious structures encompass what truly resides within these different levels of existence? The stories we're about to hear go beyond reasonably "straightforward" encounters with the Divine or angels, nor are they especially neat, tidy, or in accordance with what we consider within the realm of "expectable" spiritual experiences.

I'm hopeful that these reports will accelerate interest in the nonmaterial realms, using whatever intellectual, intuitive, and technological tools we possess. Once there is enough interest in, and even demand for, information about them, such phenomena might become an acceptable topic for rational inquiry. Ironically, we may have to rely more upon science, especially the freewheeling fields of cosmology and theoretical physics, than on our more conservative religious traditions for satisfactory models and explanations of these "spirit-world" experiences.

I had expected to hear about some of these types of experiences once we began giving DMT. I was familiar with TERENCE MCKENNA'S tales of the "self-transforming machine elves" he encountered after smoking high doses of the drug. Interviews conducted with twenty experienced DMT smokers before beginning the New Mexico research also yielded some tales of similar meetings. Since most of these people were from California, I admittedly chalked up these stories to some kind of West Coast eccentricity.





Therefore, I was neither intellectually nor emotionally prepared for the frequency with which contact with beings occurred in our studies, nor the often utterly bizarre nature of these experiences. Neither, it seemed, were many of the volunteers—even those who had smoked DMT previously. Also surprising were the common themes of what these beings were doing with so many of our volunteers: manipulating, communicating, showing, helping, questioning. It was definitely a two-way street.

As strange as the reports that follow are, our 1990s research was not the first in the scientific literature to describe DMT-induced “contact.” There also are reports from the 1950s quoting volunteers to that effect. These older DMT cases are remarkable in their foreshadowing of the stories we were going to hear almost forty years later. What is even more striking is that I have been unable to locate any similar reports in research subjects taking other psychedelics. Only with DMT do people meet up with “them,” with other beings in a nonmaterial world.

These older clinical excerpts derive from patients with schizophrenia, many of whom had been hospitalized for years, if not decades. They were not especially verbal, insightful, or personable. They received DMT in studies attempting to determine how similar the DMT state was to schizophrenia. Researchers also were interested in gauging whether naturally psychotic patients were more or less sensitive to DMT’s effects.

A patient with schizophrenia in a study at STEPHEN SZÁRA’S former laboratory in Hungary reported the following after a high dose of intramuscular DMT:

“I saw such strange dreams, but at the beginning only. . . . I saw strange creatures, dwarves or something, they were black and moved about.”¹

An American research team also gave DMT to patients with schizophrenia. Of the nine subjects, the only one who could say anything about her experience was an unfortunate woman who, after getting a robust dose of 1.25 mg/kg IM DMT, stated:

“I was in a big place, and they were hurting me. They were not human. . . . They were horrible! I was living in a world of orange people.”²

These little vignettes should keep us from becoming too com-

placent in believing that what our volunteers reported is purely a New Age, 1990s-in-Santa Fe phenomenon. The spirit molecule revealed unseen worlds, and their inhabitants, to Western science long before our research began.

KARL’S early encounter with life-forms, like his visions of DNA described in the last chapter, offered a prelude to future, more elaborate stories from other volunteers. KARL was a forty-five-year-old blacksmith. He was married to ELENA, whose enlightenment experience we’ll read about later.

Eight minutes into his non-blind high-dose injection, he described this encounter:

“That was real strange. There were a lot of elves. They were prankish, ornery, maybe four of them appeared at the side of a stretch of interstate highway I travel regularly. They commanded the scene, it was their terrain! They were about my height. They held up placards, showing me these incredibly beautiful, complex, swirling geometric scenes in them. One of them made it impossible for me to move. There was no issue of control; they were totally in control. They wanted me to look! I heard a giggling sound—the elves laughing or talking at high-speed volume, chattering, twittering.”

In the last chapter, we heard about AARON’S experiences of unseen worlds. Let’s return to his first non-blind high dose of DMT. He looked at me about 10 minutes after the injection and shrugged, laughing:

“First there was a mandala-like series of visuals, *fleurs-de-lis*-type visions. Then an insect-like thing got right into my face, hovering over me as the drug was going in. This thing sucked me out of my head into outer space. It was clearly outer space, a black sky with millions of stars.

“I was in a very large waiting room, or something. It was very long. I felt observed by the insect-thing and others like it. Then they lost interest. I was taken into space and looked at.”

AARON summarized his encounters with these beings after a subsequent double-blind high dose:

“There is a sinister backdrop, an alien-type, insectoid, not quite-pleasant side of this, isn’t there? It’s not a ‘we’re-going-to get-you-motherfucker.’ It’s more like being possessed. During the experience there is sense of someone, or something else, there taking control. It’s like you have to defend



yourself against them, whoever they are, but they certainly are there. I'm aware of them and they're aware of me. It's like they have an agenda. It's like walking into a different neighborhood. You're really not quite sure what the culture is. It's got such a distinct flavor, the reptilian being or beings that are present."

"How about the scary element?" I asked. "What's the worst they could do if they are unleashed with access to you?"

"That's what it's about. It's the sense of the possibility that's so strange."

In a later chapter, we'll read about the physical problems LUCAS encountered after his high-dose session. However, it's interesting to review part of a letter he wrote to us a few days after that experience:

"There is nothing that can prepare you for this. There is a sound, a bzzzz. It started off and got louder and louder and faster and faster. I was coming on and coming on and then POW! There was a space station below me and to my right. There were at least two presences, one on either side of me, guiding me to a platform. I was also aware of many entities inside the space station—automatons, android-like creatures that looked like a cross between crash dummies and the Empire troops from *Star Wars*, except that they were living beings, not robots. They seemed to have checkerboard patterns on parts of their bodies, especially their upper arms. They were doing some kind of routine technological work and paid no attention to me. In a state of overwhelmed confusion, I opened my eyes."

It was at this point in Room 531 that LUCAS's heart rate and blood pressure plummeted to nearly unrecordable levels.

We will read about CARLOS's shamanic death-rebirth experience elicited by his first non-blind high dose of DMT in chapter 15. During one of his high-dose sessions, he also met beings who tried to help him with his anxiety:

"There's this whole different world with architecture and landscape. I saw one or two beings there. The beings even have gender. The skin was not flesh colored. I communicated with them but there wasn't enough time. I was so strung out, excited, agitated when I arrived there. They wanted to try and reduce my anxiety so we could relate."

GABE, whose transport into a nursery or playroom we read

about in the last chapter, felt an even greater sense of care and concern from "the spirits" during his first high-dose DMT session:

"There was an initial sense of panic. Then the most beautiful colors coalesced into beings. There were lots of beings. They were talking to me but they weren't making a sound. It was more as if they were blessing me, the spirits of life were blessing me. They were saying that life was good. At first it felt like I was going through a cave or a tunnel or into space, at a fast rate definitely. I felt like a ball hurtling down to wherever it was."

Many volunteers' encounters with life-forms in these non-material worlds involved the powerful sense of an exchange of information. The type of information varied widely. Sometimes it concerned the "biology" of these beings.

CHRIS was thirty-five years old, married, and a computer salesman. He was quite artistically talented, too, and performed in local theater productions. He had taken psychedelics fifty to sixty times before starting our research. He hoped his DMT sessions with us would "propel me into a state of awareness I have been seeking during eight years of LSD use, but have only had glimpses of previously."

His non-blind high dose was "the most reassuring experience of my life." The separation of his mind and body was effortless, and he decided that "if death is like this, there's nothing to worry about."

CHRIS returned for the tolerance study a few weeks later. He lifted the eyeshades after the first dose and said:

"There was a set of many hands. They were feeling my eyes and face. It was a little bit confusing. There were more individuals. They were recognizing and identifying me. It was more intimate. At first I thought it was the eyeshades on my face, but it definitely was not!"

Filling out the rating scale, he added:

"To get to that space I had to get through some sort of a non-benevolent space. It felt like there were talons and claws there trying to guard it in a way."

These were long mornings and he needed encouragement. I let my intuition guide me: "If need be, let them rip you to shreds, then you can get on with it."





“Dismemberment is part of the shamanic initiation, isn’t it? I felt a dragonlike presence. And, there were the same colors—red, golden yellows.”

“The colors can be like a drape or a prelude or a curtain. Even though they’re so pretty, you can get through them to the other side.” Coming out of his second dose he looked stunned, and he grasped for words that seemed inadequate:

“It was wild. There were no colors. There was the usual sound: pleasant, a roar, a sort of an internal hum. Then there were three beings, three physical forms. There were rays coming out of their bodies and then back to their bodies. They were reptilian and humanoid, trying to make me understand, not with words, but with gestures. They wanted me to look into their bodies. I saw inside them and understood reproduction, what it’s like before birth, the passage into the body. Once I established what they were communicating, they didn’t just fade away. They stayed there for quite a while. Their presence was very solid.”

I had been hearing about lots of encounters by then and could at least validate his experience: “You wouldn’t expect it.”

“I try and program it and I go in with an idea of what to see, but I just can’t. I thought I was developing tolerance, but then,

Bang! There were these three guys or three things.”

He looked awkward talking about his experience. I empathized with his perplexity, saying, “It does sound odd.”

“It sure does. I wasn’t sure as I was lifting my eyeshades if I wanted to talk to you about it.”

CHRIS’S third dose was relatively uneventful. He stayed aware of his body, his heart beating in his chest, his stomach growling from hunger. His fourth dose built upon the themes of the previous three and concluded with many features of a mystical experience:

“They were trying to show me as much as possible. They were communicating in words. They were like clowns or jokers or jesters or imps. There were just so many of them doing their funny little thing. I settled into it. I was incredibly still and I felt like I was in an incredibly peaceful place. Then there was a message telling me that I had been given a gift, that this space was mine and I could go there anytime. I should feel blessed to have form, to live. It went on forever. There were blue hands, fluttering things, then thousands of things flew out of these blue hands. I thought ‘What a show!’ It was really healing.

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“It was part of me, not separate. It was a reassurance that this wouldn’t go away, that it was mine, that a connection had been made. The whole thing was really crucial to my spiritual development. It’s what I tried to do with LSD, a sort of self-initiation. With LSD, it worked in some ways and didn’t in others.”

Stranger yet are stories of procedures, more or less intrusive, performed by the life-forms of these nonmaterial worlds upon our volunteers during their DMT intoxication.

JIM, a thirty-seven-year-old schoolteacher, was a volunteer who didn’t like to talk much about his experiences. During his tolerance study, we talked about going further through the bright colors, which he admitted were distracting him. He felt there might be “beings” behind the colors, and I encouraged him to see if there were. After emerging from his last dose, he said almost offhandedly, and with little emotion:

“I went with them as you suggested. There were clinical researchers probing into my mind. There were sort of long fiber-optic things that they were putting into my pupils.”

This was years after we had stopped using the pupil measuring card, so it had nothing to do with what was happening in Room 531. I asked JIM what that was like for him.

“It was pretty weird, but I figured it was just the drug.”

JEREMIAH, at fifty years of age, was one of our oldest volunteers. He had recently retired from decades of service in the armed forces and was beginning a new phase of his professional life by obtaining training in clinical counseling. He was also starting his third family, and he underwent a face-lift halfway through the dose-response study. He was a busy man.

During the first few minutes of his non-blind high dose of DMT, JEREMIAH burst out in several exclamations: “Whoa!” “Wow!” “Incredible!” He began beaming, a huge smile across his face. He seemed to be having a great time:

“It was a nursery. A high-tech nursery with a single GUMBY, three feet tall, attending me.³ I felt like an infant. Not a human infant, but an infant relative to the intelligences represented by the GUMBY. It was aware of me, but not particularly concerned. Sort of a detached concern, like a parent would feel looking into a playpen at his one-year-old lying there. As I went into it, I heard a sound: hmmm. Then I heard

two to three male voices talking. I heard one of them say, ‘He’s arrived.’

“I felt evolution occurring. These intelligences are looking over us. There is hope beyond the mess we are making for ourselves.

“I couldn’t change the experience at all. I couldn’t have anticipated it or even imagined it. It was a total surprise! I tried to open to love but that was silly. All I could do was observe it.”

I found this last comment especially interesting because it challenged my assumption that what JEREMIAH encountered was a product of his mind, rather than a “true” perception. “Opening to love” is shorthand for an effort to change the anxiety caused by an unexpected or unpleasant experience into love. If what JEREMIAH had just encountered was only a product of his own imagination, he may have been able to alter his reactions. The fact that his attempt felt “silly” reminded me of the futility of trying to “open to love” to a oncoming truck. “Opening to love” as he found himself instantly dropped into an alien nursery was such an ineffectual and inappropriate response that it seemed laughable.

Several months later JEREMIAH received his double-blind 0.4 mg/kg DMT dose. At 5 minutes he began:

“That was much more intense than the first major dose. It’s a different world. Amazing instruments. Machine-type things. There was one person operating some of this stuff. I was in a big room; he was in another part of it.

“I feel a little shaky . . . a little hypersensitive . . . there are little tremors going through my body.”

“Maybe closing your eyes might help. Here, let’s put a blanket on you, too.”

“There was one big machine in the center, with round conduits, almost writhing—not like a snake, more in a technical manner. The conduits were not open at the end. They were solid blue-gray tubes, made of plastic? The machine felt as if it was rewiring me, reprogramming me. There was a human, as far as I could tell, standing at some type of console, taking readings or manipulating things. He was busy, at work, on the job. I observed some of the results on that machine, maybe from my brain. It was a little frightening, almost unbearably intense. It all began with a whining,





whirring sound.”

JEREMIAH’s last double-blind session was the less overwhelming but definitely psychedelic 0.2 mg/kg dose. At this session he was surrounded by the orthopedic traction cage, but he denied that it bothered him. JOSETTE was filling in for CINDY that morning. At 10 minutes, he began:

“There were four distinct beings looking down on me, like I was on an operating-room table. I opened my eyes to see if it was you and JOSETTE, but it wasn’t. They had done something and were observing the results. They are vastly advanced scientifically and technologically. They were looking just over the traction bar in front of me. I guess they were saying, ‘Good-bye. Don’t be a stranger.’”

JOSETTE said that some of what JEREMIAH described reminded her of some of her own “weird” dreams, and she went on to tell us about one of them. JEREMIAH replied:

“That was a dream you described. This is real. It’s totally unexpected, quite constant and objective. One could interpret your looking at my pupils as being observed, and the tubes in my body as the tubes I’m seeing. But that is a metaphor, and this is not at all a metaphor. It’s an independent, constant reality.”

JOSETTE collected the last blood sample and left the room, closing the door behind her. JEREMIAH and I relaxed quietly together.

“DMT has shown me the reality that there is infinite variation on reality. There is the real possibility of adjacent dimensions. It may not be so simple as that there’s alien planets with their own societies. This is too proximal. It’s not like some kind of drug. It’s more like an experience of a new technology than a drug.

“You can choose to attend to this or not. It will continue to progress without you paying attention. You return not to where you left off, but to where things have gone since you left. It’s not a hallucination, but an observation. When I’m there, I’m not intoxicated. I’m lucid and sober.”

DMITRI’s sessions continue to fill out themes of testing and experimentation upon volunteers once the spirit molecule brought them into nonmaterial realms.

Twenty-six years old when he started in the DMT research,

DMITRI was of Greek extraction. He lived with HEATHER, whose experience of unseen worlds we read about in chapter 12. He was a writer and editor and was a seasoned and steady explorer of inner space. He had smoked DMT about sixty times and had taken LSD “hundreds of times,” ketamine fifty to a hundred times, and MDMA about thirty times.

When I arrived in his room, DMITRI was casual about the day’s schedule:

“I’m not too excited about this. I know it’s just a low dose.”

“Wait until tomorrow,” I replied.

Ten minutes after I injected this low dose, DMITRI said:

“It was pretty psychedelic, more so than I thought it would be.”

The next day, Dr. V. and his assistant, Mr. W., joined us as guests. Dr. V. worked for the NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE, the agency funding my research. He was developing a project that might treat drug abusers with the hallucinogenic drug ibogaine, obtained from the African *Tabernanthe iboga* plant. He wanted to see the effects of a powerful psychedelic drug given in a research setting.

Mr. W. had been one of the most helpful people during my search through the regulatory labyrinth for human-grade DMT. I was happy to share with him the results of his assistance.

DMITRI’s partner, HEATHER, was with us that day, too. Add DMITRI, LAURA, and me, and there were six in all. It was a crowd in Room 531.

Almost immediately after the injection was complete, DMITRI began breathing deeply and rapidly. He repeatedly sighed and yawned as if to dispel physical tension. At about 9 minutes, he asked for some water, and thanked us when we gave him a few sips. After wetting his mouth, he began:

“I feel like I’m in a mild state of shock. I feel really shaky.”

“Here’s a blanket.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t forget to breathe. There’s a lot of energy being re-



leased.”

I asked LAURA to go out into the hall and turn off some beeping equipment outside. DMITRI wasn't quite sure what we were doing. He decided to ignore the fuss:

“The first thing I noticed was a burning in the back of my neck. Then there was this loud intense hum. It was like the fan at first, but separate. It began engulfing me. I let go into it and then . . . WHAM!

“I felt like I was in an alien laboratory, in a hospital bed like this, but it was over there. A sort of landing bay, or recovery area. There were beings. I was trying to get a handle on what was going on. I was being carted around. It didn't look alien, but their sense of purpose was. It was a three-dimensional space. I expected cartoonlike creatures, like a commercial for LSD, but this was, ‘Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!’ It was unlike any other DMT experience I've had.

“They had a space ready for me. They weren't as surprised as I was. It was incredibly un-psychedelic. I was able to pay attention to detail. There was one main creature, and he seemed to be behind it all, overseeing everything. The others were orderlies, or dis-orderlies.

“They activated a sexual circuit, and I was flushed with an amazing orgasmic energy. A goofy chart popped up like an X-ray in a cartoon, and a yellow illumination indicated that the corresponding system, or series of systems, were fine. They were checking my instruments, testing things. When I was coming out, I couldn't help but think ‘aliens.’

“I am so disappointed I didn't talk to them. I was confused and in awe. I knew that they were preparing me for something. Somehow we had a mission. They had things to show me. But they were waiting for me to acquaint myself with the environment and movement and language of this space.”

The atmosphere in the room was surreal. It was bursting with people and a very strange story. I hoped Dr. V. and Mr. W. were all right. I also wondered if I might lose my funding the next week. Or see it doubled.

“It was not like any UFO abduction I've heard about. These beings were friendly. I had a bond with one of them. It was about to say something to me or me to it, but we couldn't quite connect. It was almost a sexual bond, but not sex like intercourse, but a total body communication. I was filled with

feelings of love for them. Their work definitely had something to do with my presence. Exactly what remains a mystery.”

Let's close this chapter with one of the most striking interventions performed on a volunteer by these otherworld beings. In BEN's experience, they not only tested and probed him, but also implanted something into his body.

BEN was twenty-nine years of age and had recently relocated from Seattle. He was a drifter, having held thirty jobs in just ten years. He was an old friend of CHRIS, about whose entity-contact encounter we just read. During one of his longest stints of employment, BEN had served as a military policeman for two years.

BEN was an intense fellow—short-cropped, nearly shaven head; a muscular build; and a very direct manner. He actively sought novelty and change, so it's not surprising that in his written statement about why he wanted to participate in the New Mexico research, he replied: “I am an explorer, and I expect this will be an interesting experience.”

As with DMITRI, BEN's non-blind, low-dose DMT session was relatively powerful. His high sensitivity to DMT warned us that the next day probably would be one of the biggest psychedelic experiences of his life. I told him to be ready.

While a little nervous the next day, BEN was eager for his non-blind high dose to begin. I spent a little more time than usual getting him ready, advising him to try and take some big deep breaths as the DMT went in: “You may take in a breath and have that be the last thing you remember; you may not even notice the out-breath. That means you're there.”

BEN tried to breathe deeply as the drug was going in. Then his breathing settled down as he obviously fell under the influence of the drug. His heart beat visibly in his chest. At about 3 minutes, his neck showed some hives, something that had also happened to several other volunteers who had truly astonishing stories to tell us later.

At 8 minutes, several total body spasms occurred, and he cleared his throat. It was time to try and ground him. “We're going to put a blanket on you. Try to breathe into that tension if you can.”





He slowed his breathing and starting calming down, a big smile on his face. He stayed silent for 36 minutes, longer than most of our volunteers, before I felt the urge to rouse him:

“It started with a sound. It was high-pitched like a tightly taut wire. There were four or five of them. They were on me fast. As crazy as this sounds, they looked like saguaro cactus, very Peruvian in color. They were flexible, fluid, geometrical cacti. Not solid. They weren’t benevolent but they weren’t non-benevolent. They probed, they really probed. They seemed to know time was limited. They wanted to know what I, this being who had shown up, was doing. I didn’t answer. They knew. Once they decided I was okay, they went about their business.”

His eyes were open, glazed, staring at the ceiling. He seemed unable to grasp what he had just undergone. “I know. It sounds incredible to you. To us, too, but it happens.” Haltingly, as if he weren’t really sure he wanted to tell us:

“I felt like something was inserted into my left forearm, right here, about three inches below this chain-link tattoo on my wrist. It was long. There were no reassurances with the probe. Simply business.”

LAURA asked, “Was there any fear?”

“Maybe at the onset, at just having my ego brushed aside. When they were on me, there was a little bit more confusion than fear. Kind of like, ‘Hey! What’s this?!’ And then there they were. There was no time for me to say, ‘Who the Hell are you guys? Let’s see some ID!’”

There are surprising and remarkable consistencies among volunteers’ reports of contact with nonmaterial beings. Sound and vibration build until the scene almost explosively shifts to an “alien” realm. Volunteers find themselves on a bed or in a landing bay, research environment, or high-technology room. The highly intelligent beings of this “other” world are interested in the subject, seemingly ready for his or her arrival and wasting no time in “getting to work.” There might be one particular being clearly in charge, directing the others. Volunteers frequently comment about the emotional quality of the relationships: loving, caring, or professionally detached.

Their “business” appeared to be testing, examining, probing, and even modifying the volunteer’s mind and body. Sometimes testing came first, and after results were satisfac-

tory, further interactions took place. They also communicated with the volunteers, attempting to convey information by gestures, telepathy, or visual imagery. The purpose of contact was uncertain, but several subjects felt a benevolent attempt on the beings’ part to improve us individually or as a race.

I was baffled and nonplussed by the sheer volume and bizarre nature of these reports. My crude and minimal responses to volunteers’ tales in this chapter clearly reflect my quandry. At first I tried to avoid the pitfalls attendant to developing any explanatory model, either for my benefit or for that of the subjects. After a while, however, we all needed to make sense of these types of sessions.

As a clinical research psychiatrist, I entertained the idea that the regularity and consistency of these reports, and the strength of the sense of reality behind them, supported a biological explanation. We were activating certain hard-wired sites in the brain that elicit a display of visions and feelings in the mind. How else could so many people report similar experiences: insect-like, reptilian creatures?

I believed that these experiences were hallucinations, albeit rather complicated ones—simply products of brain chemistry brought on by a “hallucinogenic” drug, like a waking dream. Several volunteers’ eyeballs did rotate in their sockets during high-dose DMT sessions, reminding me of rapid-eye-movement sleep, when dreaming occurs. Maybe DMT was inducing a wakeful dream state.

However, research subjects tenaciously resisted biological explanations because such explanations reduced the enormity, consistency, and undeniability of their encounters. How could anyone believe there were chunks of brain tissue that, when activated, flashed encounters with beings, experimentation, and reprogramming? Neither did suggesting that it was a waking dream satisfy volunteers’ need for a model that made sense and fit with their experience. Many even prefaced their reports by saying, “This was not a dream,” or, “I couldn’t have made it up if I wanted to.”

At a slightly more abstract level, I tried a psychological explanation. That is, these experiences were symbolic of something else: wishes, fears, or unresolved conflicts. However, these “symbolic” explanations weren’t any more successful. Even gently persistent interpretations fell flat. How could these experiences reflect unconscious psychological issues like aggressive or dependent wishes?



In some volunteers the need to make sense of the strangest sessions was almost academic: "It was just the drug."

For others, however, this need took on a pressing urgency. How could they have possibly undergone the experience they just did? Was it their imagination? How could their imagination generate a scenario that felt more real than waking consciousness? If it were "real," how does one now live his or her life, knowing that existing right now are multiple invisible realms inhabited by intelligent life-forms? Who are those beings? What is the nature of their relationship to the volunteers now that they had made "contact"?

At a certain point I decided to suspend my reductionistic, materialistic, "I know what this is" approach. Not that doing so helped me feel any more comfortable with what I was hearing. But at least I no longer would risk making things worse by explaining away people's experiences as something else. Interpreting, explaining, or otherwise reducing their reports usually caused volunteers to shut down, and I knew I would be missing valuable and important pieces of the entire story if I couldn't encourage them to talk.

So, as a thought experiment, I decided to act as if the worlds volunteers visited and the inhabitants with whom they interacted were real, as real as Room 531, the hospital bed, the research nurse, and myself. There now was freedom to respond more empathically, and to see where it led. It also made it possible to start considering other ways of understanding research subjects' eerily consistent reports.

Nevertheless, there was a nagging discomfort in taking this approach in responding to reports of contact. I began wondering if I were starting a descent into some sort of communal psychosis.

So did the volunteers. Upon hearing of similar encounters by their comrades at our post-study socials, several subjects decided to form a DMT support group that met every month or two. Their reason? "I can't talk with anyone about these things." "No one would understand. It's just too strange." "I want to remind myself that I'm not losing my mind." ✧

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