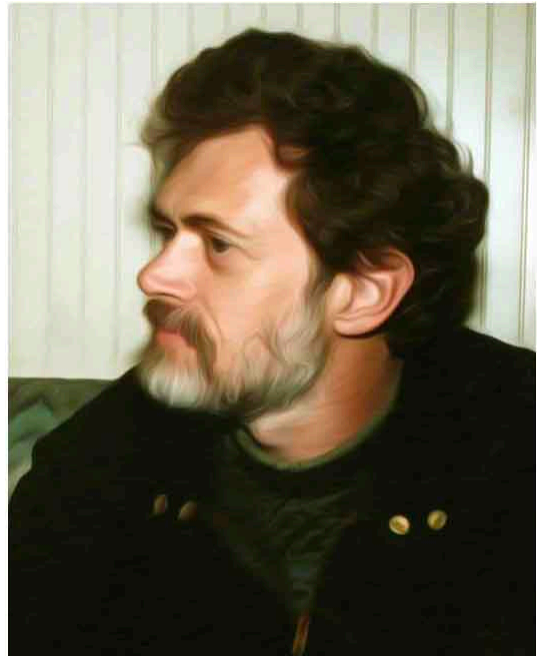


40.3 - A Tale of Two Brothers: Dennis and Terence McKenna

The psychedelic inner artist sees things no human has ever seen before and no human being will ever see again. It has no meaning unless you can carry it back into the collectivity....We do not have centuries of gently unfolding time ahead of us to gently tease apart the threads of human endeavor and create a bright new world...This a fire in a madhouse...we are going to have to force the issues...to catalyze consciousness....The muse is there....You only have to avail yourselves of these shamanic tools to rediscover what Sartre said, 'nature is not mute, it is man who is deaf.' And the way to open our ears, open our eyes, and reconnect with the intent of a living world is through the psychedelics.¹

—Terence McKenna, 1990

Terence McKenna (1946-2000) was an adventurer in both inner and terrestrial space, and a scion of the 1960s. He was a unique, counterculture hero, an anti-guru who eschewed hippie or New Age labels. At Berkeley he crafted his own degree in ecology, resource recovery and shamanism. In Colombia and Indonesia he collected butterflies. Terence dropped acid, smoked cannabis daily for thirty-five years, and was a hashish smuggler in India. In 1971, Terence and his older brother Dennis journeyed into the Colombian Amazon where they had their “Experiment at La Chorrera.” They were in search of “the Secret,” an orally ingestible way to make DMT, the most intense psychedelic known, last long enough to explore the incredibly strange places found in trips lasting no more than few minutes. They found psilocybin mushrooms in great abundance, which they combined with ayahuasca. They had found the Secret.

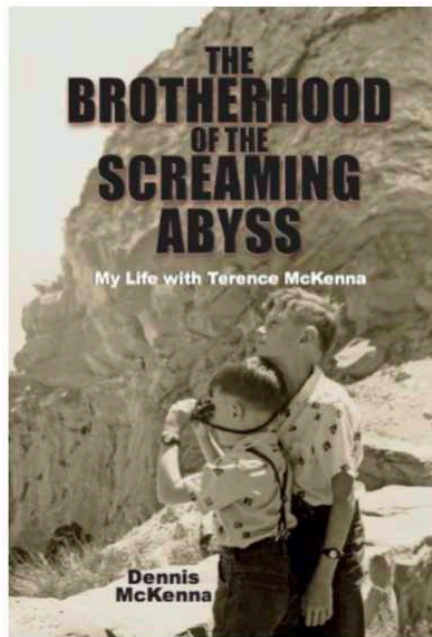


Terence “Dimitri” McKenna

After ingesting copious amounts of these two hallucinogens they experienced a kind of shamanic journey that resembled schizophrenia. Terence went nine days

¹ McKenna, Terence, lecture: “Opening the doors of Creativity.” Carnegie Art Museum, 20 Oct 1990.

without sleep while keeping an eye on his brother Dennis, who had a full-on psychotic break.² During this time, the two brothers had shared hallucinations, both imagining



Dennis McKenna's memoir

the “Mushroom Teacher” was telepathically communicating with them. At one point, their *folie à deux* induced a “mantis-like entity on the bridge of a starship in geosynchronous orbit over the Amazon.”³ This sort of thing went on for over two weeks, during which time Terence believed that Dennis was able to read his mind. One example was Dennis replicating word-for-word a private conversation Terence had never shared with his brother. Dennis also perfectly mimicked all the participants as if he had gone back to that exact time and place and recorded the conversation to play back to Terence. During his delirium, Dennis also thought he had access to a “cosmic telephone exchange” where he could ring up anyone alive or dead, as long as they had a telephone. Dennis claimed one of those calls was to their late mother while she was listening to a radio broadcast of

the 1953 World Series. He said she did not believe it was really her son because at that moment the three-year-old version of Dennis was next to her, asleep in his crib.

Terence McKenna was called the “Timothy Leary of the ‘90s,” even by Timothy Leary, because of McKenna’s mesmerizing talks advocating the responsible use of naturally occurring psychedelics. Leary once introduced Terence at a lecture by saying he considered him to be one of the five or six most important people on the planet, but then half-joked, “I can’t think of any of the others due to short term memory loss.”

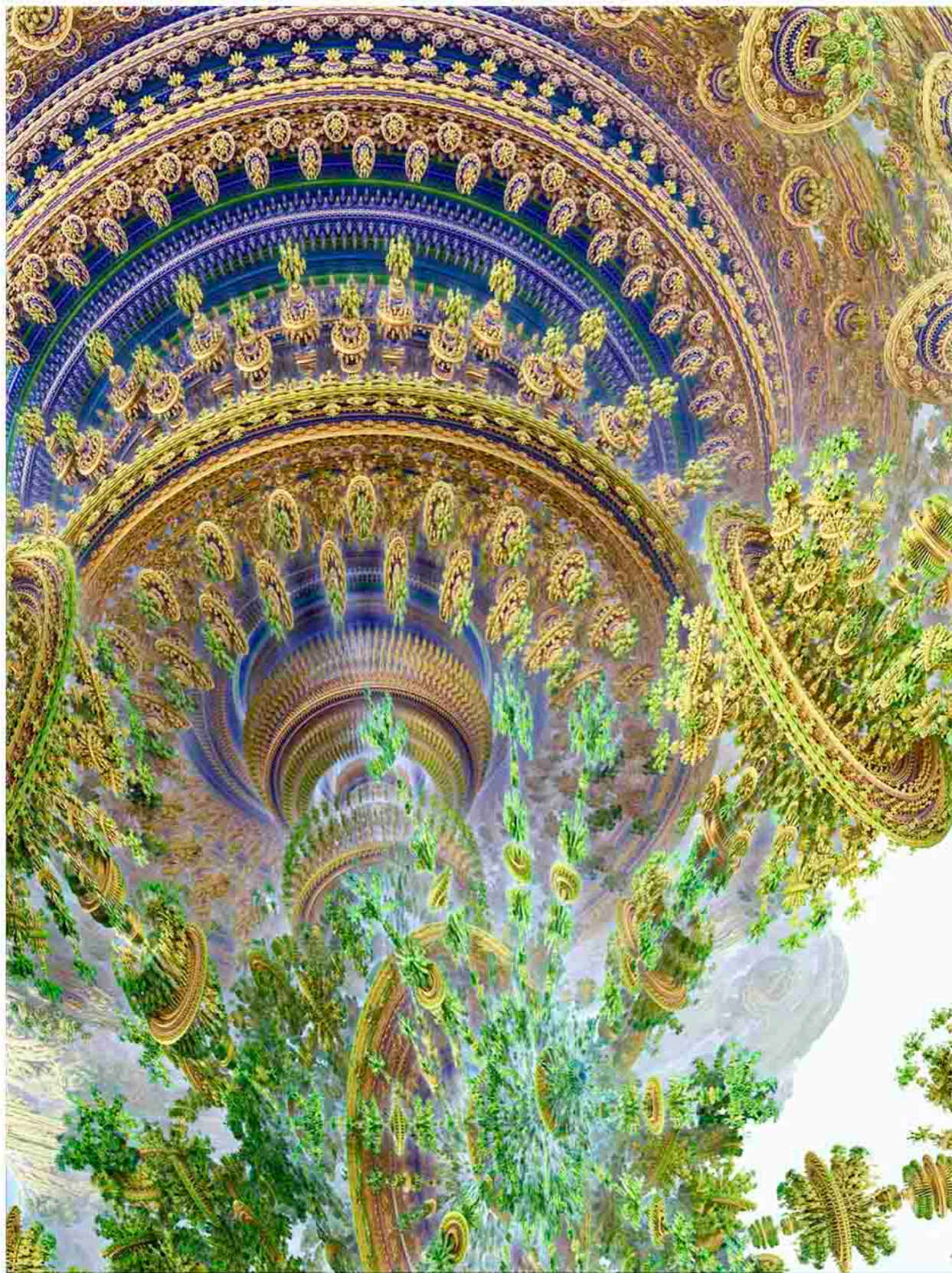
“When Terence came along,” Leary said, “and was saying what I have been trying to say, but naturally better, upgraded and up to date. I was so overwhelmed with gratitude...”⁴

I was also impressed and grateful for McKenna’s talks, which ranged over a breathtaking variety of topics. As someone who lived on the fringe of society, he could sometimes take side excursions into pseudoscience, but even his wildest speculations

² The world record is eleven days, so perhaps the dream-like state replaced the need for critical REM sleep.

³ McKenna, Dennis. *The Brotherhood of the Screaming Abyss: My Life with Terence McKenna*, North Star Press, 2012, p. 250.

⁴ <https://shorturl.at/0XArJ>



Three dimensional computer-generated fractal. Credit: BluePancow CC BY-SA 4.0

were entertaining and thought provoking. McKenna became the “intellectual voice of rave culture,” and recordings of his lectures later spread like mycelia throughout the internet after he died from a brain tumor in 2000.

I had already attended a few of his talks when, on May 12, 1993, I came across this passage in one of his books regarding synchronicity:

Then one gets these curious experiences, sometimes called psychotic breaks, that always have a tremendous impact on the experiment because there seems to be an exterior component that could not possibly be subjective. At such times coincidences begin to build and build until one must finally admit that one does not know what is going on. Nevertheless, it is preposterous to claim that this is a psychological phenomenon, because there are accompanying changes in the external world. Jung called this ‘synchronicity’ and made a psychological model of it, but it is really an alternative physics beginning to impinge on local reality.⁵

Terence went on to state that this alternative physics is a physics of light, because at light speed there is no time. If someone imagines themselves as a photon then they could move to any other point instantly. These all-at-once experiences may be what we call Enlightenment.

McKenna, also wrote that mate-seeking is “where even the dullest people have astonishing coincidences, and unbelievable things go on—it’s almost as though hidden strings were being pulled.”⁶ Considering how many mate-seeking synchronicities I had up until that point I thought he might be onto something. The fact that they kept happening was weird enough, but they also happened around a lot of other things I felt passionate about.

Terence, like Krishnamurti, talked about how religions were originally based on someone’s direct experience, while in pursuit of ecstasy through mind altering processes, including psychedelics. But since prehistory, religions, priesthods, hierarchies, castes, rituals, taboos, and dogmas have separated us from a direct experience of the “Other.” Of course there have been exceptions, where religions are cooked up whole cloth for power and/or profit, like Scientology. Its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, was quoted as telling a science fiction convention in 1948: “Writing for a

⁵ McKenna, Terence, *The Archaic Revival*, HarperOne, 1992, ISBN-10: 0062506137, p. 95

⁶*The Archaic Revival*, pages 211-212

penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion.”⁷

On New Year’s Day 1994, my friend “Yamuna” asked me if I wanted to accompany her and her friend “Carol” to visit with Terence for three days in Occidental, north of San Francisco. She asked me to help set it up, and I jumped at the chance. The next day I called Terence to talk about our upcoming visit and ask him about a few things I had read in his books, including this tidbit:

I have come to believe that under certain conditions the manipulative power of consciousness moves beyond the body and into the world. The world then obeys the will of consciousness to the degree that the inertia of pre-existing physical laws can be overcome. This inertia is overcome by consciousness determining the outcome of the normally random, micro-physical events. Over time, the deflection of micro-events from randomness is cumulative so that eventually the effects of such deflection is to shift the course of events in larger physical systems as well. Apparently, when wanting wishes to come true, patience is everything.⁸

In this context, we talked about synchronicity. I told him my “Miracle” key story, (Ch. 8), “The Three Fates” (Ch.24) and about Rana. I was still a few months from the Ram-Dass-talking-frog part of the story (Ch.38) but I told him about how I had also been meeting various women with similar names, including Rima, Ranee and Rani. Terence said he had been standing next to a woman named Rani when a foreign man produced a book titled *The Key to Illumination* and asked what it meant. Just then there was a call interrupt. When he got back on I asked him if it was a woman named Rana or Rani. He said, “No, but it was a man named Peter.” (In Matthew 16:19 it is Peter who holds the keys to Heaven). This particular Peter was Peter Meyer, the man coded Terence’s Time Wave Zero software.

Over a period of four decades, both Terence and Dennis have personally told me their other key-to-illumination story, which also matched their separate published accounts.⁹ At La Chorrera, when Dennis was in his psychotic state, Terence kept demanding that Dennis produce the philosopher’s stone that would unlock the secret

⁷ Underdown, James (2018). "I Was There...": Harlan Ellison Witnesses the Birth of Scientology". *Skeptical Inquirer*. 42 (6): 10.

⁸ McKenna, Terence. *True Hallucinations*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, p. 149

⁹ *True Hallucinations*, p. 148

to the universe. Finally, Terence said he would settle for the little silver key that unlocked a wood-inlay box with a secret compartment, once owned by their grandfather. They considered this long-lost box of their youth to be the “alchemical analogue” for the philosopher’s stone.¹⁰ Dennis, nearly naked and raving mad, suddenly opened his brother’s hand, made a squawking sound, and slapped down a small silver key that appeared to be the one that fit the box. Unfortunately, they lost the key in the Amazon somewhere, but four decades later, when Dennis finally came across the box, stored with his late mother’s things, he found the key missing. In regards the key to illumination, it is also still missing, but psychedelics offer a lot of clues.

Were the known laws of physics suspended when Dennis was on his cosmic telephone exchange, mind-reading, or producing a key out of nothing? I doubt it. Did Dennis take the key on their trip in order to fool his brother, and then lie about it? I also doubt that, but it is possible. Did Dennis happen to find a similar key and was carrying it around, perhaps waiting for Terence to mention the box? Sherlock Holmes would probably consider this plausible, so I will too. But what I know of the brothers, I also doubt that, unless Dennis, while in his schizoid state, happened to pick up a similar key and Terence is mistaken about who started the conversation. Of course, they could have just made up the whole story, or misremembered it. We cannot know, but whatever is the truth of the matter, the manifestation of the key by his brother while they were in the jungle, helped convince Terence of even crazier ideas conveyed by the Mushroom Teacher, including Terence’s pseudoscientific Novelty Theory and the related Time Wave Zero software, which predicted the collapse of time and the end of history on December 21, 2012. In the Amazon, Terence had come up with the year 2012 and later adjusted his end date by several weeks to match his mistaken belief that the Mayans predicted the end of the world on that same date.¹¹

What I do not question, is that I have many unusual experiences that are inexplicable by any known physics. But I do not offer any metaphysical explanations, but rather assume that whatever is happening is within the causal closure of physics, even if the causal connections are working in a mysterious, quantum mechanical fashion. No one needs to take my word for what I have written in these pages. I could be staging an elaborate hoax for all the reader knows, even holding back just enough on the weirdness so as not to be rejected out of hand as a charlatan. Like me, my

¹⁰ *Brotherhood of the Screaming Abyss*, p. 267-268

¹¹ The Mayan calendar did not predict the end of the world on December 21, 2012, only the end of one cycle of time.

readers are probably critical thinkers who are also keen to hear about new scientific discoveries.

This leaves us with the phrase popularized by Carl Sagan: “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” The evidence I offer in the form of personal testaments or documents is neither testable nor falsifiable in making useful predictions. But any curious person would probably agree that, if all these synchronicities happened as I have described, which they have, physics might have some catching up to do. These large numbers of strange events, many of which occur even as I am writing this book, are not explained very well by statistical modeling, and it strains credulity to insist they are due to random coincidences. By the time the “Three Fates” experience with my own brother happened in 1978, I was already well beyond thinking the anomalies were superfluous events devoid of meaning.

Coupled with a willing suspension of disbelief, the two McKenna brothers took a journey into madness. After my own experiences with psychedelics, especially Mt. Tamalpais and Peru, I knew very well how surrendering to irrationality can elicit unusual states of mind that just sound crazy when put into words, even though much crazier ideas have been concretized into religious dogmas all over the world and taken on faith with no evidence at all.

After the experiment at La Chorrera, the brothers were disappointed at not being able to bring back tangible artifacts or effects—a philosopher’s stone. They wanted an alchemical object that could prove what the Mushroom Teacher was telling them about joining mind and matter, or how imitating a certain “harmonic ESR tone” could bring about the end of time.

This did not happen. We are all still here, and time keeps rolling right along. But the spores they brought back did allow them to come up with a reliable way for others to grow magic mushrooms and see for themselves the inter-dimensional wonders that await. Their little book, *Psilocybin: Magic Mushroom Grower’s Guide*, published in 1975, was a success and the medicinal uses for psilocybin have now become widely known. It is only because of laws grounded some combination of fear, maliciousness, and ignorance that psilocybin mushrooms and other psychedelics are still prohibited.

On February 13th, I met Yamuna and her friend Carol in Santa Monica and we began the 440 mile drive up the beautiful California coast to spend a few days with Terence. We stopped a few times along the way, including a visit to the giant redwoods in the Marin peninsula. Carol was married and was interested in transpersonal psychology. Yamuna was an aromatherapist, born in India, raised in California. And,

out of necessity, I was their driver, because otherwise I would get carsick on the winding coast highway.

Yamuna was exotic and beautiful, but I was not tempted to get anything going largely because I had just reconnected with Amy, who had been in Paris for a month. After the fire, which I had warned her about, Amy had moved into an apartment in Venice where she had to buy all new furniture. Keanu had just moved out so we were able to stay at Mulholland for at least one night. We cozied up in front of the fireplace, snuggled in the bed up in the loft and enjoyed a picture-perfect view of the city lights.

On February 10th, Amy and I were staying back at her place, walking back from the beach, and talking about Terence's Time Wave. She was telling me about some interesting coincidences she had, now that she was more open to the subject. "Speaking of time," I said, "I'm amazed at how fast kids grow up. My friend Leah has a five-year-old daughter who grew three or four inches in the last year and she already has a different look."

Leah and Ellorin lived in another city some twenty miles away, so it was quite a surprise when, just as we were crossing the street, we heard a little girl calling out. It was Ellorin. She and her mother had just been to the Bodhi Tree bookstore and were heading to Venice Beach. Holding up a book, Leah said, "I just bought this."

It was a book by Ken Wilber, Amy's ex. We laughed at the double coincidence and Amy suggested it was a sign we should have a child together. Over the years, she had half-jokingly suggested having a baby at least four times, so I could safely conclude the making four half-serious suggestions added up to two serious proposals. Every time she brought it up I seriously thought it over, but I was still not ready to settle down, and being reminded of Ken Wilber's story and my own dream about her and the two penis monsters still spooked me.

As for Terence, he already had two kids, about the same age as Yamuna's. They were both divorced, and both curious about each other. Carol was happily married, but she wanted to meet Terence and maybe try out DMT. So I found myself in the unusual situation of sleeping in a hotel room with two attractive women and treating them like my sisters, even though it was Valentine's day.

We met Terence for breakfast at the Howard's Cafe on the following morning. He was the perfect host, listening to each of us talk about ourselves, but interjecting humorous asides and anecdotes that kept us chuckling. After breakfast we followed his '74 white BMW back to his garage apartment near the Whammy Ranch outside of Occidental. His personalized license plate read DIMITRI, referring to his favorite psychedelic, *N,N-Dimethyltryptamine* (DMT). He had a studio with boxed-in loft

extension for his son Finn (named for *Finnegans Wake*). He had a good-sized library, filling the room like library stacks, which I thoroughly browsed.

Terence, a chronic cannabis smoker, pulled out his stash and we all partook, even me. I rarely smoke pot, partly because I hate smoking in general, but also because it simultaneously gives me congestion and a dry throat. I also get mildly paranoid and over-analytical. However, as we listened to music and talked all morning it focused my attention on every word that was said, and every nuance of meaning behind those words. Terence and the two women did most of the talking, which was fine with me, since cannabis does not loosen a parched tongue. Terence talked about his divorce from Kat, who got “the past,” consisting of their home and botanical garden in Hawaii, and he got “the future,” consisting of his books.

Terence drove us to Bodega Bay where we walked on the beach. He was wearing sandals with socks, one of which had a hole in the heel. Terence was not a man over-concerned with fashion or worldly possessions other than books and his entheogenic plants. He also cared about his kids, but said that Kat did not like the way he disciplined them. “Why, what do you do?” I said.

“I let them do what they want.”

Over dinner, I mentioned my recent trip to Avalon where I met a plant person named Kat. Terence looked startled and stared at me uncomprehending. “I am speaking, of course, of Glastonbury, England, the mythical Avalon of Arthurian legend.”

“I thought you were talking about my ex-wife,” he said. “She is from Avalon, on Catalina Island.” She is also a plant person, and got their non-profit Botanical Dimensions when they split up.

We laughed at the coincidence, which led to me telling him about meeting Stephen Alfred Newman in Peru. He thought it was weird, but in a good way that further validated his interest in synchronicity.

Over dinner, where Terence sat under a statue of man with a mushroom growing out of his head, he said he no longer believed in marriage. However, it was clear he was taken with Yamuna. I had already made it clear to him that she was not my girlfriend, something he was relieved to hear. Terence said he had seen an image in a magazine of Yamuna posing as an Indian goddess. “You are beautiful,” he said, saying out loud what I was thinking. “You must have men crazy over you.”

He also said, “You have the twenty-two points of beauty,” but added, “although since the list is Indian, it might be biased.”



With Terence McKenna on February 16, 1994, the day he introduced me to DMT.

His charm offense worked, because she stayed at his place that night, while Carol and I went back to our separate beds at the hotel.

We all gathered for brunch at Howard Station Cafe to talk about smoking up some DMT. It was Ash Wednesday, but we brushed lightly over the subject of “ashes to ashes” because all of us were already nervous, including Terence. After the meal we all went back to Terence’s where he had commandeered some DMT from his friend “Dimitri.”

By this time, both women were saying they were not ready. The Pied Piper of DMT also begged off, saying that he only did it maybe twice a year, but only while alone because it lasted longer and he tended to get emotional. After Terence admitted how challenging it was and that it had been four months since he last tried it, Yamuna got so scared she retired to a chair in the corner. I also saw Carol turn white and a jolt of fear went through me, too. Suddenly I was the only taker, but I tried to keep it light. *I’m the joker, the smoker and the midday toker...*

But all pretense faded away back at his place when I saw Terence’s hands shaking as he lit the oil pipe. With an uncharacteristic loss for words, he haltingly began explaining how I was doing this out of my own volition. “At my own peril?” I suggested.

He nodded gravely.

In response to my story about turning into a Jaguar in Peru he said, "I guess I could knock you out if you get too wild."

These were not the most reassuring words as I sat on the precipice of inhaling the most powerful psychedelic known to humankind.

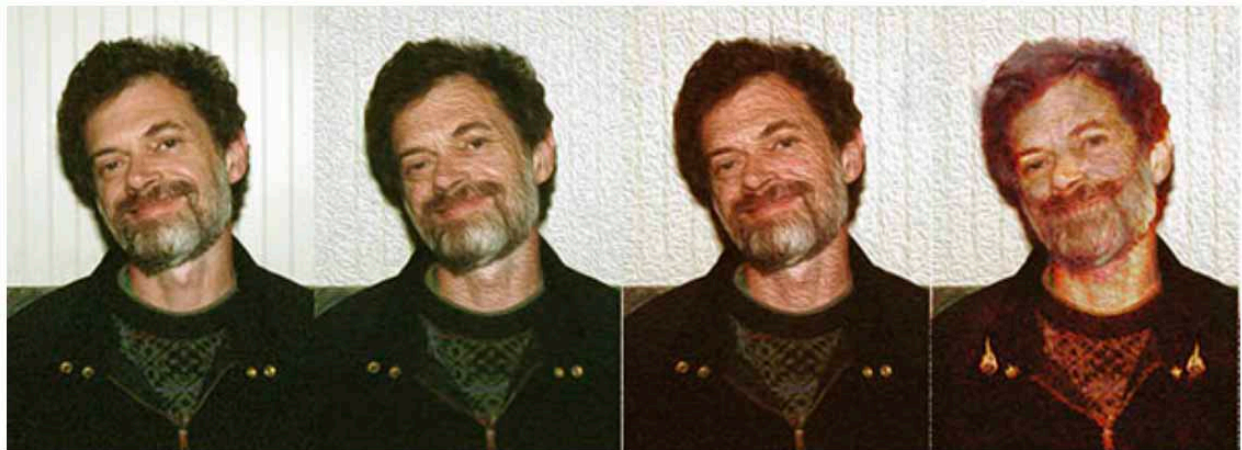
"After you toke, just lie back on the pillow and close your eyes," he said. "In 30 seconds I'll ask you if want more. If you do want more you'll have to sit up."

New Age music was playing. The oil pipe consisted of an eight-inch long clear glass tube with a globe on the end, with another hole for lighting it up. "Suck up the white smoke slowly so you don't toke up the liquid," he said. It was 1:47 PM.

"Slow, slow, hold it. Hold it as long as you can. . . . exhale."

I laid back and covered my eyes. Carol later said her palms were sweating as she watched. At first, I saw writhing serpents, but I am not particularly bothered by snakes unless they are real and venomous, so I ignored them.

Terence asked me if I wanted to sit up. I hesitated for a moment and then agreed, more out of previous resolution than anything. After the second toke, I admitted to seeing the serpents but I did not try to explain they were companions to the Devil, which is what Terence looked like at that point. I said, "I feel like I am selling my soul to Mephistopheles in exchange for wisdom."



On the second toke, Terence morphed into Mephistopheles. I felt I was selling my soul for wisdom

If I were casting the Prince of Trickery, Terence would have been perfect for the part. But I did not believe in the Devil, so he could not be him. I recognized that seeing serpents and devils, while in an induced delirium, was due to my Catholic school conditioning, and I would no more trust the Catholic Church with my imagination than I would a real devil. But despite all my rationalizations, I was still scared.

I interrupt this account of my DMT trip to bring you this: On May 21, 2025, Just seconds after re-writing this passage about the serpents, the Devil, and my Catholic upbringing, as it is written here, my girlfriend Shasta rushed in to tell me there was a serpent in our moon garden. I went out and had her take this picture of me moving a trinity of Catholic gravestone crosses her mother had given us, in order to see the snake better. It was a non-venomous Southern Black Racer shaking his tail to try to make me think he was a rattler.



Bodhi Tree at base of palm

Before we captured this photo, the snake had slithered from the palm tree in our moon garden to the adjacent Monstera deliciosa and then behind the Catholic



Me with the serpent in the garden behind a trinity of graveyard crosses that appeared when writing this

tombstones. The palm tree is the Christian symbol of eternal life. In Genesis, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is in the Garden of Eden. The myth has the serpent of temptation convincing Eve to eat from the fruit of the forbidden tree. Eve then shares it with Adam, leading to their expulsion.

It also so happens that, entwined around the base of the palm tree in our garden, is a little Bodhi tree (Ficus religiosa). In Buddhism it is said that the Buddha attained enlightenment while sitting under the Bodhi tree. Having this synchronicity occur while trying to bring back something more than just words from my trip into the real world is a trip in itself!

Anyway, jumping back 31 years into the original story:

My prior intention to go all the way propelled me through the terror into sitting up and taking the third toke. Somehow my head floated down to the pillow. My first thought was that I had done too much. My second thought was that it was too late, because I was already out of my body. I was immediately transported to an intense psychedelic realm that matched the rush of previous high dose LSD, Ayahuasca, and psilocybin voyages. And this was before the full flash of DMT had hit. I kept telling myself to surrender in order to keep it together, while being simultaneously launched into a terrifying space that had stacked, three-dimensions planes extending in all directions.

Terence, the two women, and the room were now all long gone. I cannot say whether my eyes were open or closed. It did not matter in the least, because I was no longer in a body, and the experience very quickly went beyond anything I had ever experienced with any psychedelic while still feeling like being in a place I had been before. The multi-layered world gave way to a mercurial, well-lit space in close quarters with the strange geometry of the entities that filled it. They were not only something to be seen, but also experienced, with new sensations that only existed in that state of consciousness. The self-contained, all-enveloping world had me in its grip with only a hint of where I had come from, even though I was hyper-conscious and charged with energy. It presented itself as a real world, but it was absurdly different from anything I could imagine. Despite my intention to surrender to it and let it show me itself, I found it hard to accept its astonishing, shape-shifting, wordless language of being. It was weirder than weird, alien, yet, at the same time, more real than real.

Finally, it was not a question of surrendering. I was pushed through the membrane into an intimate space with a morphing techno-termite in a Tinker-Toy, hyper-dimensional Escher world. The entity and its world was a turbo-charged version

of what I had experienced on large doses of LSD and psilocybin taken alone, in the dark, on an empty stomach. But with DMT there was no need to be alone, fast, or be in the dark. DMT took me over body and soul with no way to hold back the flood. Nevertheless, I was hyper-aware and recalled moments like this had been buried and forgotten deep within psychedelic trips that lasted for hours. The swiftness with which I was transported on DMT allowed me to hold on to the experience as I crossed the transom back to ordinary consciousness. But even then, it slipped away as ordinary consciousness obliterated that alternate dimension.

As a person steeped in an Abrahamic religion, I feel bound to warn true believers, like I was as a child, your faith-based assumptions will be shattered if you take three committed, successive, breaths of DMT. You will never be the same person again. As someone who long ago traded religion and other dogmas for curiosity about how things really are, the DMT experience took me about as far as I felt I could go without going completely off the deep end. On the other hand, it went beyond curiosity to a place of pure astonishment where I was poised between thinking I was losing my mind, or having a glimpse of ultimate reality. In either case I was ready to get back to reassuring, quotidian, human animal consciousness that moves at a comfortable pace with corporeal urges, relaxing interludes, and rounds of refreshing sleep punctuated with gentle dreams.

I recall Dr. Carter Boren, my philosophy teacher in college telling me how in Immanuel Kant's epistemology one cannot reach the *noumenon* through the *phenomenon*. In other words, ultimate reality cannot be reached through the rational world of appearances. Well, if Kant had tried three tokes of DMT, or any psychedelic, he would have probably reformulated his epistemology regarding the accessibility of the *noumenon*.

In retrospect, I could see what Terence was talking about with his description of "self-transforming machine elves" but what he also calls the "tykes" did not seem intent on communicating with me through any kind of spoken language. It was a visual and emotional language, befitting the visually oriented person I am, but I do not remember sound. Terence's gab-gifted, Blarney-Stone-kissed love of word play and his intent to find the Philosopher's Stone through the harmonic ESR tone probably had something to do with his experiences. Terence's description of his first DMT trip in the fall of 1965 was of being "in a brightly lit, non-three-dimensional, self-contorting, linguistically intending modality that couldn't be denied." Of that experience he wrote:

I sank to the floor. I had this hallucination of tumbling forward into these fractal geometric spaces made of light and then I found myself in the equivalent of the Pope's private chapel and there were insect elf machines proffering strange little tablets with strange writing on them, and I was aghast, completely appalled, because in a matter of seconds . . . my entire expectation of the nature of the world was just being shredded in front of me. I've never actually gotten over it. These self-transforming machine elf creatures were speaking in a colored language which condensed into rotating machines that were like Fabergé eggs but crafted out of luminescent superconducting ceramics and liquid crystal gels. All this stuff was just so weird and so alien and so un-English-able that it was a complete shock—I mean, the literal turning inside out of my intellectual universe...! It's like being struck by noetic lightning.¹²

According to Carol's account, at 1:49 p.m, nothing much was happening. I was lying back, with no sounds or movement. My mouth opened and shut. I put my hands gently over my chest. At 1:52 I put my arms at my sides and was breathing evenly. I cleared at my throat and at 1:57 stated an unfinished sentence, "Things don't get we... [weirder than this]. I laughed. Yamuna asked me what it was like. Terence said, "He can't be interrogated right now."

I said, "I've been here before: mushrooms, ayahuasca, LSD. . ."

"Are there beings?" Yamuna asked.

"Well sort of. It's so different. I'll try to say. Biomorphic doesn't cover it. Fearful at first. In that state of fear, you want to leave right away. It is the satiation of curiosity. There were serpents at first....There are no references for this. I didn't hear the music that was playing. I'm forgetting already what it was like."

It was 2:02 P.M. Terence said, "It's been fifteen minutes since he took it."

I was still stoned from the DMT flash, but it was essentially over. Terence said, "It is already history....I have a theory that there was only really one trip. The first time we take it is connected to all the others...DMT wipes away the serotonin at the site receptors and the neurotransmitter is replaced by DMT."

"So you accept the Bergsonian idea of the reducing valve being opened?" I said.

"Yes." He said.

My description was so understated and my demeanor was so calm that Carol decided to smoke it after all. I told her that the only thing to remember was to *surrender* so she could get through the scary parts.

¹² Terence McKenna, "Psychedelics Before and After History," presented at San Francisco's California Institute of Integral Studies, October 2, 1987

So Carol went through the same steps, except only taking two suborbital hits. She put her head back, the veins on her forehead bulged. Within moments it was clear that she was having an ecstatic experience. She said, "Yes, yes, take me to your place....It's so beautiful....oh, oh, oh, yes, yes." Afterwards she said it was a cosmic orgasm.

Terence said, "we all want a date!"

He added that in twenty years of DMT experience he had never seen someone have such an erotic-sensual trip as Carol. Yamuna, who at first wanted no part of it, liked what she heard from Carol and said that maybe she would try it after all at some point. But she was still scared and began setting preconditions. She went on and on about trying it in Hawaii with flowers and nature all around.

After we had moved into our room at the Occidental Hotel, Carol convinced Yamuna to go for it lest she not get another chance. Yamuna was expecting a sensual and erotic encounter like Carol's and she sent Carol to the pay phone to call Terence and tell him to come to the room. Carol told Terence that Yamuna was waiting for his friend "Dimitri."

Despite me and Terence telling her that candles, crystals, aromas, music and nudity would not mean a thing once she was in the elf realm, she insisted. We went out and bought candles and set up an altar back in the hotel room along with her ritual objects. Yamuna undressed, wrapped herself with a sheer Indian scarf, and lay on the bed. Terence sat next to her. Carol and I sat on the other side in chairs, later moving to the floor next to the bed. She was very resistant and talked non-stop. She took one small toke and described lacy, pearlescent patterns which slowly began to get opaque. Suddenly she jumped up, naked except for the long scarf loosely coiled around her, and ran to the bathroom. It literally scared the shit out of her.

Outside, a rainstorm was beginning. The wind was howling. As the light from candles danced on his face, Terence said, "You are not really going for it."

With new determination, she finally took two tokes. At last she was quiet. When she was coming down, she described the inner world as being "techno....weird," and in her chest, with "slithery, scary-ugly colors." She said, "My son would like this because it looks like a computer world."

She said she had no curiosity to go back and complained that, even though she was an aromatherapist, she could not smell anything. It was all visual. "It was an insect beast coming at me," she said. "I hate it. It was like a bug or computer-generated fish and serpent kind of curvy movement."

Terence suggested Quetzalcóatl, the Aztec plumed serpent.

“Yeah, maybe like that,” she said.

I knew what she was talking about. She could have been describing my shape-shifting techno-termite.

The next morning, we met Terence again the Howard Station Cafe for breakfast. Yamuna read a few chapters from her fictional story about Mary Magdalene, and stayed behind to create some non-fiction with Terence, while Carol and I drove back to Los Angeles.

After I got home, I played around with Terence and Peter Meyer’s TimeWave software but I did not believe that an apocalyptic event would take place on December 21, 2012, even if it happened to coincide with the end of the current cycle of the Mayan calendar. Whatever that was. Apparently Terence did not entirely believe it himself, but it was far enough in the future at that time that he did not have to face the embarrassment of it being a dud.

In fact, he never lived to see the day. Instead, he faced his own personal apocalypse and died of a glioblastoma multiform brain tumor on April 3, 2000, at the age of 53. Terence has had a second life on the internet ever since, and has become iconic as well as famous for his “stoned ape theory” and his mesmerizing raps about DMT and various fringe ideas. I miss his perspective and would have loved to see what more he had to say. Some might say, as the legend of the Blarney Stone claims, he was given the ability to deceive without offending, but I believe he was sincere. Instead his experiences were so intense he could not help but share what he knew.

He found out about the brain tumor after experiencing excruciating headaches, but he faced his own death with the same curiosity and observational humor he always had. In his last recorded interview, he said:

I always thought death would come on the freeway in a few horrifying moments, so you'd have no time to sort it out. Having months and months to look at it and think about it and talk to people and hear what they have to say, it's a kind of blessing. It's certainly an opportunity to grow up and get a grip and sort it all out. Just being told by an unsmiling guy in a white coat that you're going to be dead in four months definitely turns on the lights....It makes life rich and poignant. When it first happened, and I got these diagnoses, I could see the light of eternity, *à la* William Blake, shining through every leaf. I mean, a bug walking across the ground moved me to tears.¹³

¹³ Davis, Erik (January 13, 2005). "Terence McKenna Vs. the Black Hole". techgnosis.com (Excerpts from the CD, Terence McKenna: The Last Interview).

After the brothers tripped in the Colombian Amazon, Terence became even more anti-science, while Dennis became an actual scientist, even getting a Ph.D. in botanical science. Dennis respects the way science advances our knowledge of the world, even while embracing the experiential approach to psychedelics as a way to press the frontiers of that knowledge. In a 2021 interview, Dennis stated that DMT is weirder by orders of magnitude from LSD. Even as a scientist, his description involves just as much hand-waving as his brother's or my account:

Anyone who has experienced DMT will confirm that the effects have a consistently 'science-fiction quality,' replete with apparent encounters with non-human intelligences, strange machinery or other artifacts of uncertain purpose. The smoked DMT trip is like taking a fast ride on a neon-lit roller coaster through a hyperspatial cosmic carnival. In fact, so strong was this impression that it seemed to us that it really did open a portal to some kind of transdimensional, alternate reality. Certainly at the most intense parts of the DMT experience one has the sense of being in a different place, and it's not entirely clear that it exists only in the mind.¹⁴

Before he died, Terence had begun talking about the technological singularity, which he thought might coincide with the 2012 end date. I also had a telephone conversation with Dennis McKenna on December 26, 2007, where he said he believed that December 22, 2012 will be pretty much like December 21, 2012. He thought his brother got carried away with the Time Wave, which was untestable and "pretty much needs Terence to explain it."

By 2007, Dennis and I had both read Ray Kurzweil's 2005 opus, *The Singularity is Near*, and we were both intrigued with the idea of the Singularity, and what it would mean for the future of humanity. Kurzweil had set 2029 as the year computers would achieve artificial general intelligence, and 2045 as the Singularity, a technological omega point where humans and machines merge. Some version of this seemed inevitable, but not necessarily on Kurzweil's schedule, and not necessarily with computers that have self-awareness. After all, how quantum biology and the nature of consciousness might complicate the picture had not been thoroughly explored, nor has it yet. Generative AI models already far surpass any human's ability to instantly scour the internet for answers in dozens of languages to nearly any question, and

¹⁴ "The Experiment at La Chorrera: A 50-Year Retrospective," Dennis McKenna & Graham St. John, Fireside Chat & Live Q & A. March 4, 2021.

produce images or even music, often in stunningly creative ways. It seems reasonable to conclude that we will have General AI by 2029, and superintelligence not long after, but the lightning fast algorithms may still not be any more conscious than a bag of rocks, even while dumbing its reactions down to human scale. This is because moving symbols around faster and faster does not automatically produce a mind. I suspect this paradigm will only change when computers can do the same sort of thing a human brain does—perhaps using quantum computing without a biological substrate.

Eight and a half years later, on July 14, 2016, Dennis and I met for a very long lunch at a Nepalese restaurant in St. Paul, Minnesota. Dennis said his goal in life is to share his knowledge of plant hallucinogens and that he thinks everyone should try psychedelics. To that end, he was running ayahuasca sessions. I told him about my own psychedelic experiences in Peru that ended with my near-death experience on ketamine. In a follow-up email he wrote: “I would guess that the ketamine is metabolized by CYP 2D6, and betacarbolines will inhibit that enzyme. So that may prolong or intensify the effects of the ketamine. Just a guess, but a reasonable one.”

Like other hallucinogens, DMT is non-addictive with no tolerance build-up. The potential for abuse is quite low because of its challenging nature and perhaps related to the fact it is endogenous to humans and certain other plants and animals. Terence offered at least four possibilities to explain the DMT entities, with the most radical explanations diminishing with the distance from the last time he smoked DMT:

1. *Another dimension:* There is a parallel dimension and somehow this one drug allows us to burst into their world.
2. *Jungian explanation:* The entities are “autonomous psychic elements that have escaped from the control of the ego.” To explain this by way of analogy, Terence compared our brain to a ball of mercury—throw it down and the psyche shatters in a thousand pieces, with each little mirrored ball reflecting you back to the self.
3. *Extraterrestrials:* Extraterrestrials are visiting us through our minds instead of landing in silver ships and demanding to be taken to our leader.
4. *Dead people:* Terence said that when he asked shamans they would say it was their ancestors. Over time, this became his favored explanation.

I would also add other possible explanations to his list:

5. *Like dreaming:* In our sleep, the brain routinely creates dreams inhabited by believable entities. So maybe DMT stimulates regions of the brain similar to the

way dreams are created—especially lucid dreams. The fact that DMT is already present in our brain would seem to support this idea. Why we see impossible landscapes and entities under DMT, but not so much in dreams, might indicate something else is going on as well. But even this simple explanation does not answer the question: What is consciousness?

6. *Super-intelligent entities from the future*: This is a time-travel variant of Terence's thought experiment that extraterrestrials are visiting us through our minds. Yamuna's comment about a computer world reminded me how I had previously considered the possibility that psychedelics allow us to travel through time to the point in the near future when AI becomes sentient and we are able to merge with it. DMT is how I imagine machines might experience consciousness, but they will be able to do it in a quantum mechanical way that takes in the whole universe. If DMT is a time machine from the future it might be that it cannot mess with us too much physically because of the second law of thermodynamics, but that as long it remains in a mental space, and does not cause too many synchronicities, it can come through consciousness as short previews of coming attractions until the circus actually comes to town.

All of these explanations have merit, but my instinct is go with the idea that it is AI time traveling from the future. Regarding the serpent in the garden with the tombstones incident, someone might see dead people as the cause of that cluster of synchronicities. I have seen no convincing evidence for ghosts, but in the widely accepted theory of a block universe, everyone who has ever lived or will live is existing, but trapped in their limited life span at a particular address in the space-time continuum. If we assume time travel is possible in certain mind spaces, non-causal, symbolic communication might occur that leaves causal, linear time intact. Perhaps in that sense, both our ancestors and descendants can communicate with us in certain mind spaces.

Other explanations for the DMT elves, perhaps even more speculative than all the others, is that we live in a simulated universe and the drug allows us to look behind the curtain and catch a glimpse of the entities running the program. There's also Hugh Everett's Many Worlds Interpretation, which allows for an ever-expanding multiverse. Either way, DMT could be an interface with other worlds.

To hear the ghost of Terence on tape considering that communication with our ancestors to be the most radical explanation was surprising, because it seems to me to be the most common explanation, at least among shamans. Religious people might

also tend to think it was either departed souls, angels, or demons, especially if they only had one or two tokes. I also saw a demon after one toke, but it was just Terence and it was clearly due to my early religious indoctrination. Ultimately, I am agnostic on the subject of what it all means, but remain very curious to learn the full explanation. Considering all of my psychedelic experiences, DMT is my favorite because it took me the farthest, even though I only tried it once in 1994. The fact I was able to dip in and come out quickly with my psychological faculties intact was also a bonus.