

# VISITORS FROM

AS I lay on a couch in a darkened room in the ancient city of Bath, the streets outside grew quiet and deserted and offered few clues to remind me of the familiar world. It was reassuring to find that I could still read the luminous dial of my wristwatch if I held it in front of my eyes.

Ten minutes passed, then 20, then 35. I began to feel bored, restless, even a little blasé. But at the end of the first hour of my vigil, when I tried to stand up and walk around, I was amazed to discover that my legs would not work.

Out of nowhere, an enervating feebleness had ambushed my limbs, the slightest physical effort set off uncontrollable tremors and stumbling, and I completely lost my sense of balance. A wave of giddiness and nausea washed over me and I fell back exhausted on the couch, drenched in cold sweat.

I remembered, with a shudder of finality, that it was too late to change my mind. There was no antidote to the poison I had taken. Now that it was under way, the process I was going through would simply have to be endured.

The substance I had swallowed was ibogaine, a potent and potentially deadly chemical derived from an African shrub known as eboka.

This plant is native to countries such as Gabon, Cameroon and Zaire, where certain age-old religious cults have long believed that by consuming its roots, they can commune with the spirits of their ancestors.

In short, they believe it to be the plant that enables men to see the dead — but it does not produce these visions unless consumed in toxic quantities, creating an ever-present threat of fatal overdose.

I had not approached my ordeal lightly, and was under the constant supervision of a doctor.

My primary motive, unabashedly, was research into the origins of our belief in the supernatural. But I must admit to another, much more personal motive as well.

It had to do with my father's painful death from bone cancer the previous autumn and my inexcusable failure to be at his bedside during the last few days of his life because I was too busy working.

Part of the appeal of this frankly risky experiment was

## The figures had the look of the grave

undoubtedly its promise of 'encounters with ancestors', and the possibility of closure that it seemed to offer.

As the poison remorselessly tightened its grip, I fell prey to indescribable sensations of physical and psychic unease. It was as if my body was being slowly and systematically smashed and dismembered.

My ears filled with a tremendous ringing and buzzing. My eyesight rapidly became obstructed at the edges with strange black lines, like fence-posts, so that I could no longer see my watch and had to abandon all control of time.

Great gusts of dizziness hit me, and I winced at the terrifying sensation of balancing on a swaying tightrope over a bottomless abyss. Then, in a moment of stillness when my eyes were closed, a bizarre vision popped up of a vivid, swirling tapestry of intertwining branches and leaves, elaborate arabesques



by  
**Graham Hancock**

and Celtic knot work. I blinked my eyes open. Instantly, the writhing geometric patterns vanished and the darkened drawing room returned.

When I closed my eyes again, the sinuous, intertwined patterns returned but they were quickly overwritten by something even stranger: a profile view of a heavily built, blond young man with his eyes turned towards me in a glare of reproach.

He appeared right at my side, startlingly close. His skin was pallid and his brow blotched with patches of green mould.

As the night wore on, the room became full of yet more unfamiliar people, a large and somehow threatening crowd of uninvited guests. They stayed firmly in view even when I opened my eyes — for the most part anonymous and shadowy, shoulders hunched, heads down.

A few showed their faces and, like the young blond man, they had the look of the grave.

As these eerie visions continued, I fell into a dream state for what seemed a very long time. In flashbacks of that night I believe I see my father among the crowd of phantoms gathered around me.

Sometimes these images are so poignant and intense that I can almost believe he must really have been out there, walking by with dignity and pain, just as he did when he was fighting his cancer.

For more than 12 hours after the visions ended I remained violently ill and was unable to walk. It was not until two days later that I felt completely better and was able to reflect fully on what I had seen.

If I were to nominate the single defining quality of my visions, it would have to be their remarkable sense — no matter how 'otherworldly' they were — of being real.

The spirit people I had seemed to glimpse carried with them an unassailable aura of certainty and solidity.

The experience shook me to the core, and I could not easily accept the scientific view that these were just hallucinations, mere products of my mind.

On the contrary, I felt obliged to explore an alternative possibility — an explanation that science is unwilling even to consider.

Might the spirit world and its inhabitants actually exist in some hitherto undiscovered parallel dimension? And, if so,

For millennia, man has been seduced by glimpses of the supernatural — from Stone Age monsters and fairies to alien abductions. But could they ALL be encounters with the same mysterious beings from a parallel universe?

might human consciousness be liberated from the body under certain special circumstances and become able to interact with this otherwise hidden realm?

In other words, could my 'hallucinations' have been real perceptions of real beings? Outlandish though the idea sounds, my subsequent research has convinced me that it may, in fact, be true.

I believe that such an extra-human world almost certainly does exist, and that it explains a vast range of mysterious and seemingly unconnected phenomena that have been recorded throughout human history — from the sightings of elves and goblins in the Middle Ages to today's much-ridiculed stories of UFOs and alien abductions.

MY SEARCH for proof of the existence of supernatural beings began deep within the

ancient cave systems of southwestern Europe. Here, between 40,000 and 30,000 years ago, our prehistoric ancestors chose to paint beautiful and enigmatic images on rock faces shrouded in darkness.

The great painted caves such as Chauvet, Lascaux and Pech Merle in France, and Altamira in Spain, contain some of the oldest art in the world.

It is so wondrous that when the Altamira caves were first opened at the turn of the 20th century, academics refused to believe primitive and savage cavemen were capable of such creativity, suggesting instead that the paintings were ingenious fakes or graffiti left behind by bored Roman soldiers.

Much of the art depicts animals that would have been familiar to our prehistoric ancestors such as horses, bison and woolly mammoths.

This quickly gave rise to the idea that the paintings were a

form of magic designed to give humans power over the animals they hunted.

This idea prevailed for much of the 20th century but it is hard to see why because it was so patently wrong. We can tell what our ancestors ate by the animal bones discovered in the caves, and these rarely match the creatures depicted on the walls.

More importantly, many of the images feature fantastic monsters that have never existed on Earth. Known as 'therianthropes', they are half animal and half man.

They include such grotesques as the 'Beast-Master' of the Trois Frères cave in France. Deeply engraved into a rocky ceiling, this amazing protean figure has the ears of a wolf, the antlers of a stag, the tail of a horse, the claws of a lion, and the feet, legs and body of a human being.

Other bizarre therianthrope images can be found in caves across Europe, and the similarities between them are breathtaking.

A horned bison with a man's arms and torso, daubed in red ochre in

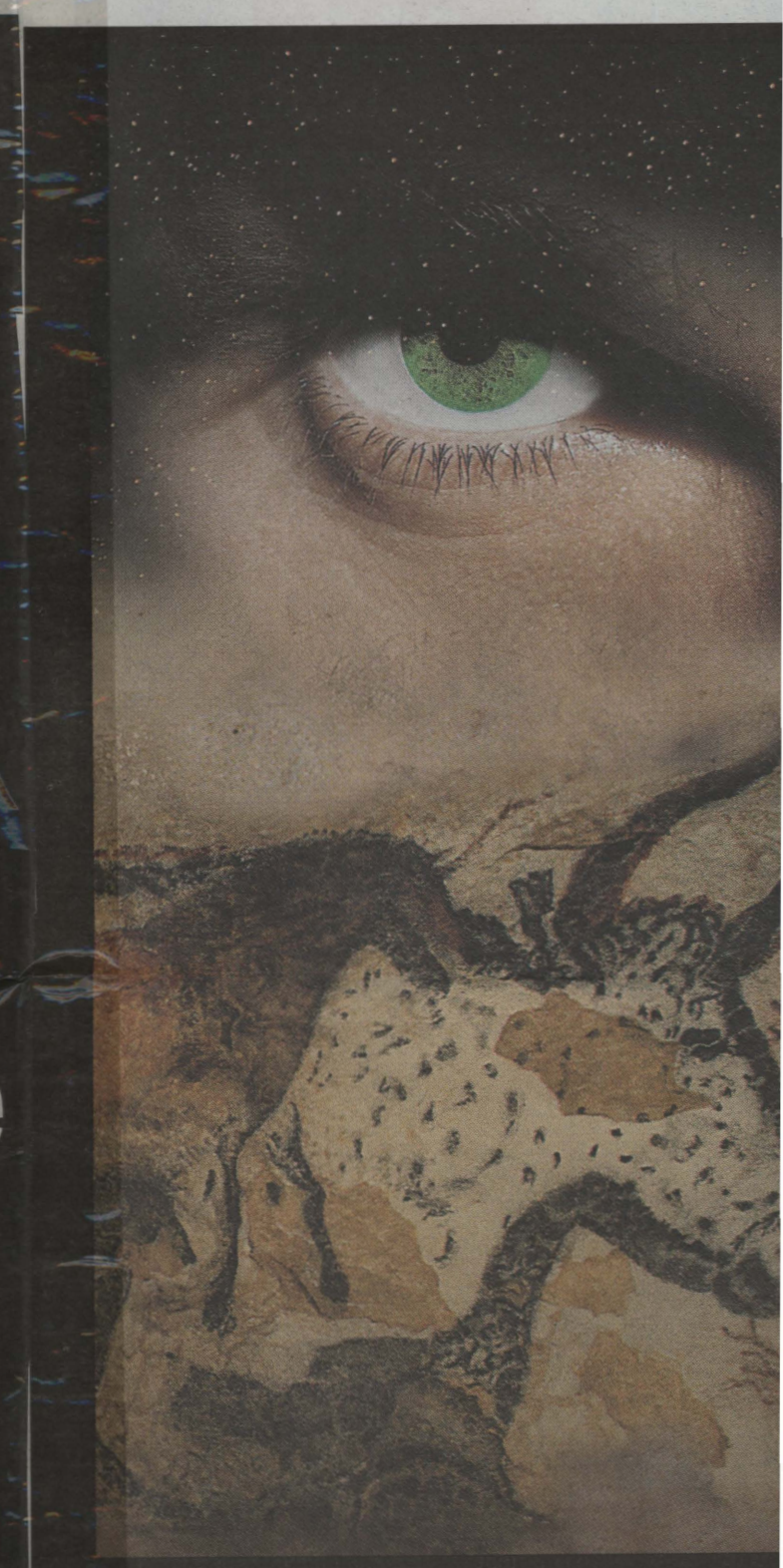
the Fumane caves in northern Italy matches another bison-man in charcoal on a cave wall at El Castillo in northern Spain.

The Chauvet image is 32,000 years old, the El Castillo image is 17,000 years old — more than eight times as old as the birth of Christ.

An image must be very powerful to be maintained for so long.

## They were half man and half praying mantis

repeated over that length of time. And just as significant is that similar images can be found around the world — not just in Europe and Africa. In a cave in India, archaeologists have discovered a terrifying painting of a figure



DAVE MALIN

# FROM BEYOND



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the Fumane caves in northern Italy, matches another bison-man etched in charcoal on a cave ceiling in Chauvet in France, which resembles yet another bison-man at El Castillo in northern Spain.

The Chauvet image is 32,000 years old, the El Castillo image 15,000. That is a difference of 17,000 years — more than eight times longer than since the birth of Christ.

An image must be very, very powerful to be maintained and

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repeated over that length of time. And just as significant is the fact that similar images can be found all around the world — notably in Africa. In a cave in Namibia, archaeologists have discovered a terrifying painting of a figure with

the feet and legs of a human being and the body, head and massive jaws of a lion. It is thought to be around 27,000 years old.

In South Africa, I have seen stunning rock paintings of beings that are half man, half praying mantis. In Tanzania, there are weird images of human bodies with insect heads, including 'feelers' and eyes on stalks.

Clearly, such images are not depictions of a hunter's prey. They are pictures of supernatural beings — and the question is, how and why were they conjured up by our ancestors?

The answer almost certainly lies in another mysterious set of recurring images in the caves: enigmatic geometric patterns such as grids, nets, ladders and zig-zag lines.

These patterns are central to the work of David Lewis-Williams, a much-respected professor of archaeology in South Africa, who has come closer than anyone else to decoding the mysteries of cave art.

Lewis-Williams was intrigued by the results of various neuropsychological experiments in which

volunteers under modern laboratory conditions were given hallucinogenic substances and asked to describe their effects.

During these tests, the volunteers reported seeing various kinds of abstract geometrical patterns known as 'entoptic phenomena'.

Since scientists believe that neither the average size of our brains nor their basic wiring has changed at all in the last 50,000 years, Lewis-Williams realised our prehistoric ancestors would have seen much the same geometric patterns had they entered hallucinatory states.

He began to speculate that the abstract patterns painted on the cave walls represented what our Palaeolithic predecessors saw when they were in some kind of deep, visionary trance — much like the one I had entered in Bath after consuming ibogaine.

It was an extraordinary theory, but Lewis-Williams found evidence to support it in the testimony of an extinct tribe of southern African bushmen known as the San.

Until 1927, when the last official permit was issued for hunting

bushmen, it was legal for whites in South Africa to murder the San, whose body parts were kept and boastfully displayed as trophies.

Anticipating their annihilation as early as the 1870s, a German linguistics expert named Wilhelm Bleek conducted interviews with the few surviving San tribesmen to record their way of life before it disappeared.

The notebooks containing his neatly-written transcripts remained hidden in South African archives until David Lewis-Williams rediscovered them nearly a century later.

The San were remarkably clear about the beautiful and mysterious rock paintings of their ancestors, which include the praying mantis images I mentioned earlier.

They revealed that the paintings were the work of designated psychics or 'shamans', whose role was to travel into the spirit world and negotiate with its inhabitants on behalf of their fellow bushmen.

On their terrifying psychic voyages, these shamans were accompanied by spirit guides who appeared to them in animal form and taught them to heal the sick, influence the weather, control the movement of animals and so on.

Intriguingly, the San described how the shamans entered the other world by means of an arduous and exhausting form of dance. Lewis-Williams realised that this would have led to extreme dehydration and hyperventilation

## The shamans went on terrifying psychic journeys

— exactly the physical conditions that could propel them into an hallucinatory trance.

When they returned from these out-of-body journeys, the shamans informed the community about what they had learnt and painted some of the strange beings and scenes they had encountered. Hence the existence of cave art.

Lewis-Williams realised that the strange geometric patterns the ancient San painted were the same 'entoptic phenomena' experienced by Western volunteers many millennia later.

As for the monstrous half-man, half-beast therianthropes, the shamans believed that to enter the otherworld they had to adopt various animal forms and the paintings depicted them at various stages of their transformation.

The fact that similar images can be seen in cave systems across the world supported Lewis-Williams's remarkable theory that they were all the work of shamans and priests who had entered states of deep trance.

Besides ritual dancing, and eating or drinking hallucinogenic plants, these trances may have been achieved through physical stress such as body-piercing, starvation or sensory deprivation in the caves where the paintings were created.

I had disturbing confirmation of Lewis-Williams's theory when I tested it for myself in the company of present-day shamans in the Peruvian Amazon. Under their guidance, I imbibed a drink made from a sacred plant known in the language of the Incas as ayahuasca — which means, literally, the Vine of the Dead.

I drank this bitter brew ten times in all and the visions always began with a parade of geometric images, much like those depicted in

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ancient cave art and described by the human volunteers in modern laboratory experiments.

Soon these visions of nets and strange ladder-like structures, multiple squares and furious zig-zags were replaced by other apparitions including a black and yellow snake which transformed before my eyes into a powerful jaguar, and terrifying beast-man figures such as a huge insect-like humanoid and a strange figure which was half man and half crocodile.

The images closely matched those that the Peruvian shamans report from their own trances. Intriguingly, many of them routinely record their visions in spectacular multi-coloured paintings.

All this left me sure that David Lewis-Williams is right that such trances were the inspiration for prehistoric cave art. But I found myself disagreeing with him on one fundamental point.

In Lewis-Williams's view, the entities encountered during the trances have no existence in reality — they are merely illusions thrown up by our fevered brain chemistry when we are in altered states of consciousness.

I wondered how he could be so confident about this. We might feel very sure that there is no more to reality than the material world in which we live, but we cannot prove that this is the case.

Theoretically there could be other realms, other dimensions. Indeed, that possibility is not only central to all the world's great religious traditions but also a common hypothesis in modern

## Is this how we can lift the veil on other worlds?

quantum physics, which suggests that an infinite number of 'parallel universes' may exist alongside our own.

If so, then perhaps the brain is as much a receiver as a generator of consciousness and can be fine-tuned in altered states to pick up wavelengths that are normally not accessible to us.

Perhaps, by this means, shamans throughout the world, and throughout history, have found a way to lift the veil that separates everyday reality from supernatural otherworlds. Perhaps, in doing so, they have made genuine contact with powerful spirits that dwell in those worlds.

Perhaps those that have followed them — as I did, in a small way, in those dangerous experiments with sacred plants — have done the same. In which case, the visions I saw were not mere hallucinations. They were real.

ONE of the most compelling pieces of evidence for this possibility lies in the extraordinary consistency of the supernatural visions experienced by human beings over the aeons.

Unless we accept that their origins are in some sense 'real', it is difficult to understand how such similar, strange encounters have been reported with such regularity across so many different cultures.

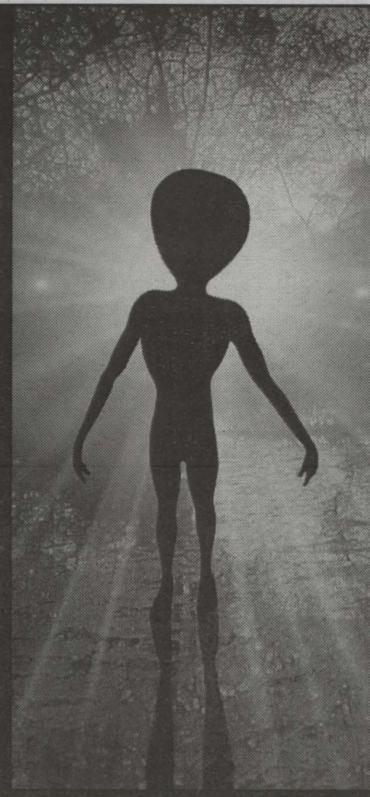
The therianthropes of European and African cave art find a mirror image in the art of ancient Egypt, which features creatures such as Anubis — the dog-headed guide of human souls in the underworld — and the crocodile-headed god known as Sobek.

Similarly, the ancient Mayan civilisation that flourished in South America believed in a being known as the Celestial Monster, a grotesque hybrid of human, reptilian and animal parts.

Greek mythology contains satyrs, half man, half goat, the minotaur — with a man's body and a bull's head — and the centaurs, a phantasmagoric combination of man and horse.

Popular culture keeps alive the legend of the werewolf, and tales of mermaids — part human and part fish — are common around

# With my own eyes, I saw the face of an 'alien'



the world. Even the Bible contains visions of human-animal hybrids. In the Book of Ezekiel, the Old Testament prophet describes apparitions of creatures with four faces — those of a human being, a lion, a bull and an eagle.

Ezekiel also reports the heavens opening and visions of fire and light, large revolving wheels and disembodied eyes — all of which have also been described by people under the influence of the sacred plant substance ayahuasca.

A concoction identical to ayahuasca can be made by combining acacia and Syrian rue, two plants that grow widely in arid areas of the Middle East, but I am not suggesting Ezekiel or other prophets necessarily ingested psychoactive substances.

Far more interesting is the possibility that they — and countless others — have been able to experience their visions naturally. Research commissioned by Harvard Medical School in America tells us that two per cent of the modern population have the ability to fall naturally and spontaneously into deep states of trance.

Although it cannot be proved, I think it highly probable that around the same proportion of humanity has *always* been born with brain chemistry in just the right state of flux to permit them visions, prophetic knowledge and encounters with spirits, without recourse to psychoactive plants or physical methods of trance induction such as dancing.

That these visions have consistently thrown up images of strange, animal-human hybrids is — to say the least — tantalising. But it is another set of creatures that recur in cave art that should really give us pause for thought.

Deep in their rocky labyrinths, in the low guttering light cast by the torches and stone lamps that we know were used at the time, the shamans of the prehistoric era chose to paint pictures of dwarfish figures with extremely distinctive features: large domed foreheads, narrow, pointed chins and big, slanting, almond-shaped eyes.

There are examples in many European caves. The first time I saw one was at Pech Merle in France, and there are four particularly menacing specimens engraved on the walls of the cave of Los Casares in Spain.

I also found myself staring into one of these eerie and unsettling faces in the Drakensberg Mountains of South Africa, as I examined a rock shelter filled with the cave paintings of the San bushmen.

If these dome-headed dwarves sound familiar, it is because they are almost identical to the descriptions of elves and goblins which have been part of our folklore since the Middle Ages. More disturbingly, they have an uncanny resemblance to the aliens who feature in modern-day reports of UFO sightings.

Extraterrestrials have been described in these terms since the very first cases of alien abductions were reported at the dawn of the

space age. One of the earliest took place in 1961 and concerned an American couple named Barney and Betty Hill, who were supposedly kidnapped by the occupants of a UFO that followed their car one night.

According to the Hills, their captors were small humanoid beings with 'rather odd-shaped heads, with a large cranium, diminishing in size as it got toward the chin. And the eyes continued around to the sides of their heads'.

Similar images of alien faces have become a staple of far-fetched films and TV shows such as the X-Files, and it could be argued that the Hills and other alien abductees were simply borrowing these images from popular culture.

But how do we explain the appearance of such figures in the art of our prehistoric ancestors?

Personally, I have never had any great interest in the UFO phenomenon and have always regarded alien abduction stories with a mixture of indifference and scepticism. Yet, to my utter astonishment, I found myself seeing almost identical 'alien' faces during my ayahuasca visions in the Amazon.

It was one of the most perplexing and disturbing moments of my time with the Peruvian shamans. The creatures in my vision didn't look friendly — on

## The creatures looked harsh and sinister

the contrary, they were terrifying and sinister, a harsh, commanding presence.

I also saw what could easily be described as space ships, rotating in the sky and pulsing with life, and had the distinct feeling that I was going to be taken up into them.

In other words, I was having what could easily be interpreted as an alien-abduction experience — while in the grip of the same kind of visions that inspired our ancestors to create their cave paintings tens of thousands of years ago.

Could it be that spirits, fairies and aliens are really all manifestations of the same supernatural entities, and that human beings can perceive them when —

knowingly or unknowingly — they enter the right kind of trance?

If so, then we might expect there to be overlaps in the way that people are said to have interacted with these beings over the centuries. And sure enough, when I examined the evidence, I was taken aback by the extent of the common ground.

Consider, for example, the way that alien abductees describe ascending to UFOs. They talk of floating, levitating or gliding upwards, often enclosed inside a beam of light. Some talk of thinner strings of light, like ropes or wires, that fasten onto their bodies and haul them into the sky.

Almost exactly the same language appears in the testimony of shamans, gathered by anthropologists, as they describe their psychic journeys into the spirit world.

A typical account comes from the Kalahari in Africa, where a shaman describes how performing a ritualistic dance enables him to see 'lines or strings of light that go up into the sky ... they are white in colour or shiny like silver metal ... you just float away with that rope'.

Other shamans — from as far apart as Siberia, Australia and North America — talk of these 'ropes' or 'cords' being let down by boats, birds or 'flying shields'.

As I read these accounts, there were often moments when I wasn't sure whether I was reading a shaman's testimony or a UFO report.

I discovered parallels of a far more disturbing kind when I looked at the many cave paintings throughout the world which depict what appear to be wounded men.

Shot through with arrows and spears like prehistoric St Sebastians, these are believed to symbolise the suffering of shamans undergoing the journey into the otherworld — an ordeal described vividly by tribes who still practise shamanism today.

They portray it as an agonising process in which shamans must undergo a symbolic death and then resurrection.

They talk of black devils who thrust lances through the shaman's head, pierce his neck and tongue and dismember his body before throwing the pieces in different directions.

These accounts forcefully remind me of my own sensations of being 'smashed and dismembered' when I carried out my early trance experiment in Bath. But they are also very similar to the distressing experiences reported by supposed alien abductees.

These abductees consistently describe being subjected to painful and incomprehensible surgical procedures. Some of the most disturbing stories have been reported by Dr John Mack, Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, who interviewed many people who believed they had been abducted.

His patients included 'Catherine' who described a metal instrument 'maybe a foot long' being inserted about six inches into one of her nostrils.

'I could feel something breaking in my head,' she claimed. 'The alien broke something to get it through, to get it into my brain. I don't know what it was. I want to know if it's going to heal.'

Another of Mack's patients, 'Eva', saw a grey spaceship, panicked, blacked out, then found herself on a table in a room with two beings inspecting her. 'I was in a foetal position, my back to them. They were doing something to my spine. My entire spine was tingling and cold. It was awful. It

felt as though they were going inside my body with some very sharp instrument and inserting it between my flesh and my skin.'

In yet another extraordinary link, John Mack's research also reveals the frequency with which abductees describe aliens as having both humanoid and animal characteristics.

As Mack puts it, the aliens 'appear to be consummate shape-shifters', and often make their first appearance as owls, eagles, monkeys or even deer before transforming into something more closely resembling human form.

Once again, we are back with the therianthropes first seen in prehistoric cave art. So what are we to make of this dense web of connections running from prehistoric shamanism through religion, folklore and fairytales to UFOs?

To date, scientists have been unable to offer any convincing theory. Some have tried to suggest that the links are somehow generated by a 'library' of extraordinarily detailed mental

## Their bodies are smashed and dismembered

images, sensations and information which is hard-wired into our brains.

They speculate that it is the same library for all of us, and that it can be accessed only in altered states of consciousness.

In that case, however, we would need to explain not only how such an eerie and otherworldly mental archive was compiled in the first place, but also why it is so important — presumably to our survival — that evolution has gone to the trouble of retaining it.

Certainly, if its contents are purely imaginary, it is very difficult to see how it would have conferred any evolutionary advantage — rendering us vulnerable in the real world as we concentrated on non-real things instead.

On the other hand, if the shamanic view of the world is right and supernatural beings are real and can give us guidance and help in our lives on earth, then we can see immediately how knowing about them would have vastly increased our ancestors' chances of survival.

In my view, it is beyond serious doubt that spirits, fairies and aliens are each locally customised adaptations of the same extremely puzzling and mysterious core phenomenon, perceived according to the prevailing culture and preconceptions of their time.

Of course, if we do accept that such spirits are real, and that they have found ways and a variety of quasi-physical forms — of which 'aliens' are only the most recent — in which to manifest themselves in our material universe, then this poses some equally difficult questions.

What business do they have with us? Why are they here? As I will describe in Monday's Mail, my research suggests an answer to those questions that is as unexpected as it is disturbing.

■ **ABRIDGED extract from SUPERNATURAL: MEETINGS WITH THE ANCIENT TEACHERS OF MANKIND** by Graham Hancock, published by Century at £18.99. © Graham Hancock 2005

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# ON MONDAY: Are there spirit messages hidden in our DNA?