That's what demons do – multiply human misery.

In frosty February I visited Graham Hancock in his house in Bath to interview him for Paranthropology. I had met Graham and his wife Santha at the conference on psychedelics, Breaking Convention, in 2011, and towards the end of a long conversation over coffee Graham mentioned that his new work – a series of novels – would be about Cortés and Moctezuma and the daimonic/demonic forces urging them towards their explosive encounter. Intrigued, I made contact with Graham some months later to suggest an interview and to seek a review copy of the novel.

War God is a gripping and frank depiction of the very real horror that accompanied this period, and the reader is not shielded from visions of this harsh reality. There is a confident balance between historical realism: conversations, sights, smells, sounds, gore – and inspired imagination: Moctezuma’s mushroom-fuelled relationship with the hummingbird god Huitzilopochtli, and Cortés’ dream-dialogue with St Peter. Importantly, Graham presents with candour and a genuinely open enquiry the very plausible possibilities of this communication between humans and deities. Making no categorical statements about the ontological nature of these entities, i.e. whether empirically distinct beings or complexes of the unconscious, the novel demonstrates that the sheer scale of slaughter and destruction was inseparable from the religious fervour of all parties. Something drove these historical figures beyond simple lust for power. This mystery is explored in War God.

Of all the many questions that I was keen to pose, it became clear that the depiction of violence and the sense of relentless brutality were the matters that most preoccupied me. Graham had told me that his first work of fiction, Entangled, had been inspired by some visions during ayahuasca sessions, and that he had experienced similar visions of the historical period of Cortés and the Aztecs. Neither Entangled nor War God shirk from presenting horrific cruelty perpetrated by humans as well as by entities of the spirit world who exert their malevolent influence over humankind. In this respect, acts of love and compassion, in opposition to acts of hate and horror, are woven into the fabric of reality as part of a cosmic conflict between good and evil. There is thus a metaphysical, perhaps theological, aspect to these novels, and I was intrigued to seek correlatives between Graham’s fiction and his other works concerning ancient architecture, lost civilisations, occult gnostic thought, shamanism, psychedelics, and political power. Over the course of the interview, it became clear that what to some readers may appear as a radical departure from his investigative, non-fiction work was in essence an integral component of a larger vision presented throughout his works of this ancient confrontation of forces. It is also noteworthy that whilst the interview lasted over two hours and covered matters as diverse as ayahuasca-inspired artwork, the Jesuits, Aztec sacrifices, the War on Terror, drone strikes, cannabis and megaliths, Graham chose to post on YouTube a 20-minute segment of the interview in which he discusses precisely this matter of dualism, which he entitled ‘Graham Hancock on Good and Evil.’ This topic was clearly at the heart of the interview.

To begin the interview, I asked what role ayahuasca had played in providing the visions for the novels. A great deal, was his response, and in particular, he explained that the narrative of Entangled appeared almost complete in a vision with a core sense that he had been mistaken about the Neanderthals, and that, importantly, he felt emboldened to present them in the true nature that he had sensed in the vision:

Graham: I can’t paint. In my case I have a gift of writing. Ayahuasca did directly influence me, partly because I asked it to. I published Entangled in 2007. I went to Brazil with the intention of seeking a novel – it’s useful to have some intention – let the vine show me what it wants to show me – or – I said that I would like to be given a vision. I felt tired of non-fiction – footnotes, etc. – rigorous defence of arguments against attack – I wanted freedom – I was also getting older and wanted something new. Ayahuasca gave me an instant answer – the
story across time – good against evil. Two entangled women – one in the past one in the present – are brought together across time by this angelic being, an entity whom I associate with Mother Ayahuasca. She could be real, she could be in our mind – who cares – most people experiencing ayahuasca see her. The Blue Angel is the benign supernatural force – who brings the two women together to do battle against the demon who desires us to take a dark and evil path. And role of women is to resist. They have to resist as they understand that some force in the universe wants us not to recognize that we have a divine spark. I was shown scenes, battles and episodes, and I was told ‘Hancock you were wrong about the Neanderthals’.

I first drank ayahuasca when researching for the book Supernatural as I had wanted to experience first-hand these shamanic altered states of consciousness rather than just reading about them. In that book I had misrepresented the Neanderthals. I was persuaded by what was then the mainstream academic line – that they were not symbolic creatures – that yes they had big brains – bigger than ours – yes they had been in command of Ice-Age Europe for 200,000 years – but they were stupid, brutish, no symbolic or spiritual life – their burials were unimportant – their culture was accidental, etc. And I had thought ‘fair enough’ and I depicted them that way. But what I was shown in my ayahuasca visions was that it was not so – they were creative, spiritual creatures. Our ancestors would not have survived had they not learnt from the Neanderthals. It was a revelation to me that I got it all wrong, that I had done them disservice. Entangled was my opportunity to put it right – to show that Neanderthals were good and decent people – they were pure love and goodness who communicated telepathically – and that although they left little cave painting, they painted their bodies. Furthermore, they taught our ancestors how to paint. Researchers have shown that origin of modern human behaviour may well have been brought about by assimilation. Terrence McKenna even thought this in Food for the Gods. It came to me in inspiration that the Neanderthals introduced our ancestors to sacred visionary medicines, from which they understood about painting. There may even have been interbreeding, and current research is investigating that. The Neanderthals taught our ancestors all this, and I feel I’ve done them justice in the novel. I’ve portrayed them as my vision – as goodness and love – and now academic research is proving this theory right, that they may have even interbred. All this I received in the vision, and it makes me quite emotional. I got many insights in the visions – at the heart of it is the dualistic view of the universe – battle of good and evil and the importance of humans to choose. A catch line – evil may not always be defeated, but it will always be resisted.

William: Human life has always been about territorial conflict, battles, skirmishes. Why the need to present it as a choice between good and evil rather than many cultural, social even biological polarities that do not imply such value?

Graham: 50 to 40,000 years ago the first anatomically modern humans arrived in Western Europe. I see no evidence for violent, negative, aggressive behaviour. The fundamental question in Entangled is what actually happened to the Neanderthals? This is a mystery of prehistory. One theory is that our ancestors, having co-existed with them for 20,000 years, ended up wiping them out. Perhaps something in them changed – some influence – that caused them suddenly to turn on the Neanderthals. That possibility is left open in Entangled – but it is presented. This is the crux of Entangled. Over 24,000 years the two girls become entangled, and Ria feels that it is her duty to prevent our ancestors wiping them out, in order to pay off some karmic debt for having done so. The demonic form gains his psychic charge by encouraging the humans to wipe out the Neanderthals. What emerges in the sequence of novels is that annihilation by anatomically modern human beings is stopped, that they die out for other reasons, and that we don’t incur this karmic debt. Something changes in humans from the end of the Upper Palaeolithic into the Neolithic – we become violent. And that’s where I entertain the notion of dark entities at the spiritual level, and positive energies of resistance. And the human dilemma is always to choose.

A friend of mine calls this world of ours ‘a university of duality.’ I think this is interesting. A lot of people reject the idea of duality and would like everything to be one – that it is all beautiful and good – and that all duality is projection. But I’m not sure how much we would have to learn in a world like that. I think that duality is a very useful teaching tool, and without it is difficult to make choices. In this particular experience duality has very important lessons to teach us – and if it were taken away what choices would we have to make?

William: But is there not a danger that a choice might be made in the assumption that it was good, and that history shows it not to be so? Does duality not go against mystical traditions of unity – that the good and the bad are always together – a harmony of polarities?

Graham: Interesting points. In ancient Egypt the duality was Horus versus Set. Horus and Set in the same head. I don’t disagree that there isn’t an overarching oneness, but I still feel that if you remove the duality you remove a useful teaching tool. Science tells us that it is all but an accident, a random process. There is no such thing as the spirit. When we die we die. End of story. There is no transcendental purpose. Science may be right. But it may be wrong – and another possibility must be considered. Consciousness may be a part of the universe rather than an epiphenomenon of brain activity. Our incarnation may
be an opportunity to learn and to choose. Perhaps, as many spiritual traditions show, we have many opportunities; and consequently we have the choice — and yes, one culture’s good may be another culture’s bad. Few people would dispute, for example, that there are cases when the killing of a person may be justified. Does the action that I’m about to take add or reduce misery? If we ask ourselves those questions, what is good and evil becomes clearer to define. In the case of Hitler, had someone killed him in 1937, they would have prevented the transgression of the sovereignty of millions of people. Very fine distinctions are to be made. But if we examine our hearts, we have some kind of compass on this — and that we do know the good and the bad — and that it is not entirely culturally constrained.

William: In your novels, investing so much narrative space to the darkness, are you in some way exorcising? Is your choice here to focus on the darkness a means to open it up? Is there some purpose?

Graham: Yes, in the novels I do dwell to some extent on negative human behavior. As a human being it is difficult, it causes me pain, but I feel it is essential. Why? Because as a species we have a capacity for denial. When something is bad we look away — and by looking away we allow the evil to flourish. We need to focus on it. Many people who don’t like Entangled don’t like it because of the violence. I’ve received many letters. They say that it is all goodness and light and we must focus on it. I respond that nothing in the novel is made up by me. All the darkness, such as the castration of one’s enemies and the wearing of the genitals on one’s head; all of this has happened. There are other forms of human sacrifice, some of which are still being practiced by humans today. If we turn away and concentrate only on goodness, we allow such matters to continue. So what I’m doing with this writing is to focus precisely on these matters. To put it right up front. Here it is. This happens. Deal with it. If we’re going to move on — and at the moment the world is in dark place — horrendous things are happening — we’re not going to solve the problems by pretending they don’t exist. And in order to confront them we have to express them.

And my writing expresses this — not with a sense of reveling in the horror, but to show the reader what these things are, and hopefully raise the opportunity to address them in the future. I also show goodness. I show choice. Cortés could have made different choices. Moctezuma could have made different choices — and I’m intrigued to think what could have happened to the world had Cortés not made the decisions he made. It seems implausible that Cortés should have achieved what he did with so few men. This gigantic and truly violent state of the Mexica (Aztecs) was immensely violent, practising human sacrifice. How could the bunch of freebooters overthrow this? I try to show how they managed it. Had Moctezuma acted with compassion and diplomacy towards his fellow peoples; had he shown more tolerance and not acted as he did then they would not have allied themselves to Cortés. All these folk detested the Aztecs, and so it is very reasonable that these folk joined Cortés. Had the Aztecs made that choice, then Cortés would have been presented with a united front on the shores of eastern Mexico. Consequently the entire venture of European colonialism would have had to have been rethought. Had they been greeted by a powerful and united force in Mexico, I feel that it would have affected the entire way the Europe operated elsewhere. It’s obvious with the conquest of the Inca. It is also obvious more widely around the world that European powers were persuaded that they could easily destroy these so-called primitive societies.

William: But in War God there seems little hope of any redemption, of any light that will resist this incredible force of darkness. Can we assume this light will come? Will it come through Tozi and Malinal, or through a spiritual force like the Blue Angel in Entangled?

Graham: Yes — absolutely — there will be redemption. This is very much a part of books 2 and 3. Goodness is through Tozi, Malinal and Pepillo. What I’m trying to show is that even in the worst circumstances — in the midst of overwhelming wickedness — it is possible for goodness and love to thrive and prevail. World War Two shows this to be the case: in the midst of the worst atrocities there were examples of goodness. I don’t want to turn away from the darkness of the period. Even if goodness didn’t win, it did speak out for what we can achieve — and yes — perhaps through supernatural intervention.

William: You suggest in Heaven’s Mirror and Fingerprints of the Gods that the Mexica inherited from previous cultures a religious practice of sacrifice that had been symbolic, and that, unable to relate to this symbolic perspective, they twisted and distorted the practice into the very literal and real practice of human sacrifice. Have you developed this line of enquiry in your research and writing of War God and its sequels?

Graham: Yes — my research over the years leads me to believe the appearance over the world of similar spiritual traditions, especially manifested through archaeology — pyramids, for example. This planet is a theatre of experience in which man has the opportunity to grow and learn — as the hermetic texts put it

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1 This is a big canard — as Graham argued that one might have justified the murder of Hitler before the war. Is this not preventative warfare? Pre-emptive strikes? This is problematic on theological, philosophical and practical grounds.
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The point that Graham raised led me to a question that I have presented to my students, and which often taxes me. Can we understand, and even forgive, the actions of the brutalising colonists and the inquisitorial clerics if we understand their ideological background? Can we enter their mind-set and consider that they earnestly believed that the Indians were damned souls because of their savagery and ignorance, and that therefore if they can convert them to Christianity they are rendering them the most blessed of gifts, salvation of their eternal souls! Likewise with heresy. If heresy is a mortal sin, then by torturing the heretic you are encouraging him to renounce the heresy. You are thus trying to save him. If heresy, furthermore, is a disease that may be spread amongst the populace, then the Inquisitors are acting in the public interest by rooting out the heretics, and thus saving the people's eternal souls. From our modern perspective such a position is unequivocally atrocious, and I often observe members of the class horrified by the thought that one might even permit a justification for this abuse. Can one forgive, or, as many of my students would aver, is it more likely that such persecution was merely a theological justification for territorial land-grab, a smokescreen for empire-building, conquest and plunder?

Graham: Good point. I have no doubt that some of the Inquisitors believed that they were doing the right thing, that they were saving the soul of the individual being consigned to the flames. Whilst this excuses nothing, it does explain how someone was able to do horrendous acts while believing they were doing good things.

William: And the same could be said of Moctezuma?

Graham: Indeed. As I investigate this period it has become clear to me that individuals who today we would classify as psychopaths were drawn to these roles, as it gave them the justification to do what they really loved doing — namely inflicting pain and suffering on their fellow man. There are too many inquisitors who quite clearly gained pleasure from this. This must be taken into account. Secondly we are shaped by cultural context. But there is too much of a tendency of our modern world to contextualise and to think that it is all a product of our conditioning. I disagree with this. We are responsible for our actions.
Serendipitously, the interview with Graham ties in well with a Masters project I am supervising concerning cultural interchange between Europe and Mexico – transculturation – focussing on the Christians who were desperately trying to bring peace and love and good blessing, and who rose up and shouted out against the brutality of their countrymen. Not only well-known cases like the friars Montesinos, Bernardino de Sahagún and Bartolomé de Las Casas – but also poor mendicant friars who entered villages with nothing but a bible, who learnt the indigenous languages, who translated sacred texts into and from these languages, who saw indigenous people as fel lows. We owe much to these folk for helping to restrain the excesses of conquest and helped to preserve some of the indigenous languages, texts, mythologies and cosmologies.

**Graham:** Indeed. Take, for example, the case of Bartolomé Olmeda, who urged Cortés not to destroy the idols and not to impose Christianity, maintaining that there is no point in forced conversion. Cortés was a man with a fanatical streak which made him excessive. Consider Las Casas and Sahagún: these guys had been through the cultural conditioning, and yet they had the courage to resist it and to say, No! This is wrong. We condemn it. We will expose the horror of this. They detested what was being done. Amazing that Las Casas was never executed. He seems like a modern human rights activist – what courage! It was possible even then to rise above cultural conditioning.

We do have choice. This is the issue. We may be constrained by circumstances, but we can always make a choice not to inflict suffering on others. Most people in the Sixteenth Century didn’t make this choice. They may not have been allowed to, but they still could have done so.

That is the other side of my novels. I talk about Aztec wickedness and I talk of Spanish wickedness and I show the opposition, like Olmeda. I focus on Muñoz in order to show the reality of the Inquisition – this horrendous destruction of pre-existing knowledge – the codices – the horrible murder of people under the pretext that they were heathens. The population of Central America plummeted from 30 million to 1 million in 50 years. This is demonic however you look at it.

Such a position helps us understand Cortés. It’s not so long ago that the cultural model of territorial appropriation was still present. It is how it still is today. I mean frankly, when a drone kills 190 people at a blaze, none of whom having performed any act of violence against the West, this is sacrifice, murder, just like the Aztecs or the Inquisitors. We likewise today have our own mechanisms for justifying our actions of aggression. Before we condemn those in the past we should look closely at ourselves.

**William:** Certainly – and one method by which I relate the past with the present in class is to call the Valldolid Debate of 1550 – in which the churchmen Las Casas and Sepúlveda debated the treatment and enslavement of the indigenous Americans – an ‘enquiry.’ We are familiar with the Hutton Enquiry (which failed to reach any firm resolution on the atrocities of the invasion of Iraq). Well, if we take the royal debate as being a public view of the horrors of a so-called ‘just war’ then we can see the parallels with today. A scrutiny of the underlying notion that ‘our values are right – theirs are wrong.’ There was resistance at the time of Cortés. There is resistance today.

**Graham:** Right – and at least today we’re not burnt at the stake for resisting. But still the powerful state apparatus uses our money to brutalise people, to impose their will on other cultures and upon us. The internet is a tool and a forum for resistance. However, nothing has really changed. The state still imposes its will, with the same belief that our system is the right one, others are false. This is utter hubris and totally disrespectful for other ways of life. And our job in the present age is to resist that tooth and nail and to prevent it happening whenever we see it.

**William:** You have talked recently about the ‘reverse missionary movement’, in which ayahuascos and curanderos of the Amazon are reaching out to the West – to the gringos who have traditionally persecuted them – in order to spread the word of Mother Ayahuasca – in order to instil a vision of nature, peace, harmony, and in order to demonstrate to western collective consciousness the gradual suicide of the human race that is currently taking place under the stewardship of western governance. Do you think this reverse missionary movement is gathering momentum? Is the pay-off not immense, in that the gringo culture may well appropriate ayahuasca traditions, degrade them, commercialise them, demonise them, etc.? Is the impact of ayahuasca tourism a concern?

**Graham:** This is a complex issue. Firstly, the experience of contact with an entity or a spirit, that ingestion of ayahuasca induces – nobody could fault me for saying that this experience is widespread – that people who have drunk ayahuasca all around the world experience an entity whom they name Mother Ayahuasca. She might be a serpent, which alarms fundamentalist Christians. Sometimes she comes as a beautiful woman. But in all cases she comes to teach us something. And those teaching are at many levels. People might receive teachings about their
own lives, about the mistakes they may be making, and I recently published an article about this – about how Mother Ayahuasca stopped me in my tracks with a 24 year cannabis habit. I have nothing against cannabis – nothing at all. It has creative and healing properties, and I highly respect the medical marijuana movement. However, there is the question of our individual relationship with cannabis. As a 24-year smoker I realised that I needed to change, as it brought on paranoia. It made me jealous of my wife and partner. And what I was shown in the ayahuasca sessions was that all of this was connected to my servitude to cannabis. I needed to stop; otherwise I would fall into an abyss from which my soul would never recover. All of this was shown to me terrifyingly starkly in the ayahuasca visions. So much so that when I returned from those sessions in Oct 2011 after those five sessions in Brazil, I couldn’t smoke again. No withdrawal symptoms – no irritability – nothing – all gone from my life. I received a teaching in those visions that was important to me. Folk who have been addicted to heroin or cocaine have reported similar experiences when working with ayahuasca.

And I can’t prove anything about the spirit of the vine – about any of this – but all I can say is, until you have drunk ayahuasca, hold back your judgments. Have a few ceremonies and then see how you feel about this entity. And then consider that your understanding of reality may not be as you thought – and that there may be another realm of reality in which such beings do exist.

Personally, I think that there’s an intelligence there, an entity who cares for us and for our species. This is what I’ve felt after fifty or so ayahuasca sessions. But I can prove nothing.

Secondly, in ayahuasca sessions, folk report an intense feeling of sadness about the environment – particularly about the rain forests. Something has gone terribly wrong about the human relationship with the planet. The destruction of the forests is a dreadful, dreadful mistake that is contrary to what we should be here for. A huge opportunity to learn from nature is being taken away from us. It has to stop. This is a repeated experience of drinkers.

And so it is an interesting coincidence that just as the Amazon is being destroyed, this spirit that has always been confined to the jungle is moving around the world to deliver these teachings.

I feel that there is some intentional reality behind this.

In the Amazon they always talk about the intelligence in the vine. How it grabs the leaves in order to gain access to the human mind. If there is a goddess or entity, it is pretty clear that this entity cannot intervene on this material plain. But it can intervene through affecting human consciousness. That’s what is happening. And people are receiving these teachings, which leads to a wish to change the direction of humanity.

William: Will ayahuasca endure the capitalist urge to commercialise and commodify? Is she doing a job beyond that which can be sullied?

Graham: Yes – I feel that the job she is doing will rise above this. And, of course, there are people preparing ayahuasca for purely commercial gain, people who don’t really understand how to work with her. As such I would urge anybody who wants to work with ayahuasca to do their research – to use word of mouth. A bit like Gnostic sects in the early Christian era – underground, illegal, disrespected and discredited. Learn from the experiences of others and rely on their anecdotes.

William: But deeper than that, are there not some shamans working for nefarious goals? Something you explored in Entangled. And further to that question, you recently submitted that: “It would be a good thing, I couldn’t help thinking, if every military leader, every religious fanatic, every president, every prime minister, every dictator presently exercising power in the world were to be required to undergo ten sessions of Ayahuasca before being allowed to make a single other decision.” How, from this perspective, do you imagine the great circus of geo-politics would be different were such leaders to experience the brew? How do we know that if Dick Cheney drank the brew, he would not simply gain more power towards his power-hungry goals?

Graham: Good question. Firstly, with the brew, a door into another dimension is opened. What’s out there isn’t only mother ayahuasca – there are other entities out there as well. I believe in some sense that the duality of good and evil in this realm is driven by the good and evil in the spirit realm. And there are entities that seem to thrive in a vampire-like way on human suffering and misery and on negative human behaviour.

William: Like Moctezuma and mushrooms

Graham: Absolutely. The Aztecs went down a dark path with mushrooms, opening a channel between Moctezuma and Huitziopochtli.

William: Or Charles Manson and LSD

Graham: Yes. Some people make these choices in this realm and in that realm. People have actively to want to be attracted to this negative aspect. Therefore if we gave ayahuasca to a power-hungry man could he simply become more powerful? Perhaps. But, what can control against that is the set and setting in which the experience is followed. We call them shamans, and our job is to develop a form of shamanism relevant to our culture. Some brujos – sorcerers – are doing the opposite of
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protector of this space, but are opening the door to negative influences. I actually believe that mere Cheney given a series of sessions in the right protected space with a skilled and experienced shaman — then it is my belief that he would undergo a profound spiritual transformation. So I believe the teaching needs to be handled in a wise and guided way.

William: Has your relationship with the craft of writing changed since engaging in the process of fiction writing?

Graham: I’m enjoying writing fiction. Not so much the scenes of violence, but the exercise of not defending every argument and writing footnotes for every assertion. It is liberating to be free of that. In the case of War God I have done much research into the history, and I do refer to that reading. This has allowed me to get into the heads of the characters. Once you start to get inside the head of Cortés, you start to understand things better about these historical characters. The whole historical canvas has opened up for me in a way like never before. The first responsibility as a writer of fiction is not to bore the reader.

William: As for non-fiction

Graham: Ok, but it is different. There are different arguments conveyed in non-fiction. Ultimately fiction is about the experience more than non-fiction. It’s about not delivering everything at once — about trying to immerse the reader in a visceral way in the historical period. It’s been an interesting experience for me to try to portray these scenes, especially the battles.

But the second thing is about having something to say, about doing something more than merely entertain the reader. The writer must give the readers the sense that they have found something out — something of value that they didn’t know before. That’s why I think I will continue fiction, as I can explore extraordinary ideas with a freedom that I didn’t have before. There is of course a need for scholarly criticism — for conservatism even — as the fire of criticism of new ideas is fundamentally a good thing. We can’t naïvely accept every thought put out there as fact. Indeed, if an idea survives that fire then something is in the theory. But, there’s a history of throwing the baby out with the water with the rejection of ideas. The gatekeepers are so furious that they look always for what is weak and not looking for the strengths.

William: Every new generation needs to start from scratch. Myers wrote a century ago in Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death: “Now it is that we feel the difficulty of being definite without being trivial; how little of earthly memory persists; how little of heavenly experience can be expressed in terms of earth; how long and arduous must be the way, how many must be the experiments, and how many the failures before any systemised body of new truth can be established. But a sound beginning has been made, and whatever may be possible hereafter need not be wasted on a fresh start.” How can we prevent constantly having to start again?

Graham: By considering the knowledge and wisdom of the ancients. In 2015 I hope to publish the next part of Fingerprints. New theories are coming through which support the hypothesis of lost civilisation, that support the dating of an immense comet impact in 10,900 BCE — exactly the window I suggested in Fingerprints. I suggested this in 1995 but there was no evidence. I tried earth-crust displacement and other things. This new work on the comet impact is compellingly suggestive of the kind of event that could have wiped out a civilisation. Then Göbekli Tepe in Turkey was discovered, where they are firm that the older layers are over 12,000 years ago. This is accepted, but not the implications. What this says about human history is not being discussed. Göbekli Tepe is a large site of multi-ton megaliths — no background to the culture — how come? Something missing in our story — missing in that time window when we appear to know that the earth was hit by a comet. That missing background intrigues me. I feel it hides the lost civilisation. The other interesting thing is carbon-dating. You can’t date stone; so the way it’s done is to date organic materials associated. This assumption has driven the timeline. The problem is that many of these sites are approached not in their pristine state. All kinds of things may have happened to these sites: many communities may have lived there; the stones may have been moved, etc. I’ve long suggested that some megalithic sites are far older than the carbon-dating record shows. There is something different at Göbekli Tepe. Work started about 12,000 years ago then about 10,000 it was deliberately covered up. We don’t know why. It was hidden and preserved. That’s why the Germans can be certain of its date. That is very important. It raises question marks over other sites — the Maltese — the Tálos in Menorca — which have the same I shape — I think it challenges the dating of all megalithic sites.

William: There are many mysteries that accompany any reflection on megalithic sites the world over — concerning the carving, the moving, the erecting, and the joining, of such immense blocks. The most persistent explanation of these questions invariably involves man-hours — that with enough people over enough years such structures as Callanish, Cheops, Tihuanaco or Machu Picchu are possible — and there the mystery ends.

However, would you agree that, regardless of the mysteries of motives, the significance of the align-
ments, and the ritual functions, there are questions about the moving and raising of the stones themselves that defy the explanations that have been offered? Do you feel that there was some technology, some harnessing of energy, that was known by megalithic builders that we neither know nor understand today? You illustrate one perspective of this in Entangled. By what means do you imagine that we may be able to recover this technology?

Graham: I share your intuition. It has been my privilege to climb the Great Pyramid five times. I simply cannot envisage man-hours. It’s almost magical. The same is true of Sacsayhuaman in Peru. It literally beggars belief. I defy man-hours. I strongly believe a technology was employed that we don’t know or understand. We think of mechanical advantage — and as we develop there the powers of the mind are diminished. It seems that there is a mind-matter influence. And our society has left that faculty go dormant. In the past, I think they had great use of that; sound, chants, etc. That’s one thing I hope to do in the sequel to Fingerprint. We’re a long way to go. We need to overcome our own reference frame. I think the megaliths are important. Something important about ourselves that we’ve forgotten about ourselves and that we desperately need to recover.

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We ended the interview there, although I could happily have continued the rap for the rest of the afternoon. Off-camera I did manage to ask the one question that I had been itching to ask since reading Supernatural back in 2005, and which I hadn’t managed to ask when I spoke to Graham at Breaking Convention: what happens on your mushroom trip at Avebury at the end of Supernatural? Eager for a story about machine-elves cavorting around the megaliths, I received the poetic response: ‘not much, really.’ At least one mystery was solved.

The mystery of good and evil, however, persists. My liberal and liberal constitution urges me to resist Graham’s invocation to perceive the world in terms of good and evil. I strongly wish to see nothing more than a vast network of values interacting and conflicting and generating friction. My willed position is that there are no values beyond the context; that forces that may be labelled good or evil are constantly in opposition and are forever morphing into other forces with other values ascribed to them. One can attempt to resist evil knowing that evil will never be overcome, because there is no such thing. It’s just a contextual and contingent value. Likewise oppression, aggression, violence — there’s no genus of these matters — just values that are placed upon acts that just are. Furthermore, whilst you are resisting ‘evil’ in one corner of the globe, someone else is resisting the ‘evil’ caused by you in another. Systems become oppressive through numbers. You resist a system that is only oppressive because it has many people helping it along. In fact, you yourself are most likely putting your shoulder to the wheel of the very system that you are now trying to resist. Then you realise there is no system — there are just endless interacting processes that themselves are endlessly interacting processes. Push somewhere and something will move somewhere else. This is the position that I try to maintain, yet I understand that such a position can become a nominalist chaos. Graham makes this clear — dualism is a useful teaching tool. Sitting on the fence is not effective resistance.

I reflected on why the presentation of violence and brutality in Entangled and War God was of such importance to me. I came to realise that I was critical — disdainful even — of the depiction of sacrifice, torture, sadism, warfare and bloodshed in both novels. Was Graham not dwelling on these horrors to an unwholesome degree? Is there not something unsavoury about such graphic images? ‘Absolutely,’ was his pragmatic answer, ‘I am dwelling on these matters to an unwholesome degree, because we cannot pretend that this savagery has not, and does not, take place.’ This is central to the vision that Graham describes being given with ayahuasca. We cannot ignore the darkness.

I then understood that Graham could easily have come back to me ‘but you do the same!’ and with good reason, as I have run an annual open lecture at the university to which I have invited speakers, such as human rights lawyers and journalists and even a former captive at Guantánamo, to demonstrate to the audience the horrors that are committed by our governments in our name. Were someone critically to say to me, ‘oh, you shouldn’t be doing that. Why dwell on torture and incarceration?’ I would reply, ‘on the contrary, I don’t do it enough — not enough at all, as I shy away from such matters as soon as I can under the justification that I shouldn’t fill my life with darkness.’ The suffering of torture in captivity is no different now than it was at the time of Cortés. That is the point, regardless of its name, whether ‘evil’ or ‘bad’ or ‘nasty’ or ‘dark.’ If you are tortured, or witness the murder of your friends and family, or hear the sound of gunfire meant for you — you are not going to smile calmly and say — ‘I accept this as a manifestation of the Unified Good.’ You are not going to confront
your torturer or the killer of your children with ‘Hey there! I don’t really believe that you’re evil – in fact I love you…’ We may all aspire to such mystic bliss, but it is unlikely to save you. It will not stop them hurting you, and it will not stop it hurting.

That, I understood, is precisely the opposition that is developed in Graham’s novels. The characters learn to love and trust, and in this way they oppose hate. Love is naturally loving. Hate is naturally hating. Ria and Leon resist the terrible Sulpa in Entangled not by loving him, but by loving and trusting and helping each other. Tozi, Malinal and Pepillo in War God likewise oppose the hatred of their oppressors not by loving them, but by loving each other. There is a pragmatic, battle-weary, realistic aspect to these conflicts.

Sulpa, Huitzilopochtli and St Peter are discarnate entities inflicting their sordid lust for conflict and desolation upon humans; ‘That’s what demons do’ Graham declared, ‘multiply human misery.’ Is there something chilling in this depiction of the power of malevolent demons, especially given that Graham experienced visions of these forces in ayahuasca encounters? Again, Graham’s pragmatic and valuable response is that just as we cannot turn our backs on human cruelty, neither can we assume that all intelligent entities of the spiritual world are benign. On the contrary, as he explained so thoroughly, shamans and curanderos need to be particularly adept at navigating these otherworld landscapes and defl ecting the influence of mischievous or downright nasty entities in order to open the healing space and prevent pain and suffering. Above all they need to be resolute enough to resist the lure of power that emanates from these more malign beings. Entangled depicts this struggle through a brujo who derives power to do harm and the shamans who need confront these brujos in the visionary realm. This is real. This is how it is, and nobody who has drunk ayahuasca, or attended any meeting in which non-material beings are contacted, or read Swedenborg, would be naïve enough to suppose that all there is angelic and benign.

Graham’s readers will naturally be drawn into speculation about major historical conflicts and the invocation of these dark entities. This is a weird and unsettling area of exploration, as the speculation can escalate into a feeling that such conflicts are created and controlled by non-material intelligences. It need not be so dramatic. If, as anyone sympathetic to the matter would aver, there are further dimensions of reality populated by discarnate souls of the dead and non-human entities (something Graham explores lucidly in Supernatural), then it is perfectly appropriate to assume that human participants in such worldly conflicts may have derived power or knowledge from these entities. Shamans, brujos and curanderos do so on a daily basis in more localised conflicts. The relationships between Cortés and St Peter or between Moctezuma and Huitzilopochtli are thus far less outlandish than may be assumed. They are part of the currency of reality, only on a vast scale. The burning question is not whether this occurs, but according to which ideologies. If Christian world leaders invoke God prior to launching a campaign of aggression against Islam; if a Moslem invokes Allah prior to retaliating with equally indiscriminate hostilities; or if Jewish settlers invoke their God prior to clearing a land of its non-Jewish occupants, are they invoking spiritual forces of compassion and love, or of hatred and violence? To whom are they really praying?

This, of course, is the link with Graham’s work Talisman, which looks at the troubled history of esoteric gnostic thought which has stealthily crept through the alleys and byways of history, occasionally blossoming in moments like Alexandria in the early Christian Roman period, the Cathar era of southern France and the Pyrenees, and the Florentine Renaissance. The message that Graham takes to be central of this ancient lineage of heretical thought is that the Christian god is not the prime creator, but a lesser entity – the Demiurge – who demands worship and obedience and instils hatred and fear. The structure of the church is thus a political institution in the service of this malevolent supernatural despot. The horror of European colonial conquest, the Inquisition, the brutal suppression of heresy such as the Albigenian Crusade, and endless wars of aggression can thus be understood as influenced by the presence of this demiurgic force. Graham, aware that this position may well offend, has discussed this in many presentations and interviews over the last few years, and one can see its integral relationship with the narratives of his two novels.

Hans Jonas describes in The Gnostic Religion the turbulent landscape out of which diverse religious-spiritual schools of gnosis thought arose especially in the Hellenised parts of the Roman Empire in the first centuries after Christ. This was a period of such cultural upheaval, of such calamities and conflicts, and of such an eradication of earlier spiritual models, that inevitably many folk looked upon their troubled landscapes and questioned whether this could really be the work of a great, ineffable and perfect god. It was reasonable to assume that it was not. As Graham
and Robert Bauval explore in *Talisman*, there was also the attempt amongst these gnostic communities to keep alive more ancient, pantheistic, mystical and perhaps harmonious spiritual teachings. This, argues Graham, is the parallel with the modern world, where destruction of the natural world and of the biosphere has reached such proportions that it would appear that human life itself is threatened; where corporatism and imperialism proliferate violence and enslavement and where individual human gnosis is declared anathema. The gnostic heresy is a wisdom that teaches people to question these brutalising institutions, to challenge their hegemony over the values of individuals and communities, and to experience the mysteries of reality first hand, joyfully. This is the wisdom that is always persecuted by the institutions, whether Church or State, or, as is so often the case, the Church-State brotherhood. Interestingly, Graham sees the *gnosis* of ayahuasca traditions and experiences as being analogous to the ancient gnostic traditions in the West.

One need not accept as gospel the dualistic, Manichean, view of good and evil in order to recognise the powerful spiritual wisdom in these gnostic traditions. One of Terence McKenna’s more beautiful and melancholic presentations is *Unfolding the Stone*, in which, like Hans Jonas, he examines the traditions of alchemy beginning in the unsettled era of the early Christian years of the late Roman Empire. The vision of good and evil was of less importance to McKenna than were the twin radical gnostic teachings which rocked both the Greco-Hellenic world and the Roman-Christian world: that we are all divine, luminous, beings; and that fate can be overcome through magic. This, again, is the connection that is made both by Terence and by Graham between expanded consciousness achieved through psychedelics and gnostic esotericism. This is the powerful narrative of both of Graham’s novels. Evil will not be overcome, as it is a force beyond the control of mankind, but it can be resisted. Fate can be overcome simply because we can choose our paths. We are not bound to consent to the control over our sovereignty that state and state religion demand. The further we explore the immeasurable capacity of our consciousness, whether with the assistance of psychedelics or through other empowering practices, the more we can understand how political structures can belittle and ridicule such capacities. This is what Ria and Tozi understand. This is what Leoni and Pepillo understand. We can overcome fate through the magic of resistance.

I write this while the press reveals the full extent of state secret surveillance, while the Bilderberg Group meets in secrecy to draft global policy, and while British Foreign Secretary William Hague delivers the poisoned words ‘if you’ve done nothing wrong you’ve nothing to be afraid of.’ How arbitrary might the state’s judgment of right and wrong be. How easily might one be branded a heretic. How readily do we relinquish power for security. How sickly is this security. How glibly do we surrender our power to corporations, interacting socially through mechanisms that so easily become systems of surveillance. How gladly do we accept that we are not divine beings. How urgent is the current appeal to resist…

**Biographies**

**William Rowlands** is a Senior Lecturer in Hispanic Studies at the University of Kent, and former Director of the Centre for the Study of Myth. He has recently completed a book concerning Borges and mysticism, which examines the relationship between Borges’ own recorded mystical experiences and his appraisal of Swedenborg and other mystics. The book asks the essential question of whether Borges was a mystic by analysing his writings, including short stories, essays, poems and interviews, alongside scholarly writings on mysticism by figures such as William James. William’s work within the Myth Centre has focused predominantly on the many aspects of the work of Jung. With co-Director Angela Voss, William organised a conference at the University of Kent in May 2011 entitled *Daimonic Imagination: Uncanny Intelligence*.

**Graham Hancock** is the author of *The Sign and The Seal, Fingerprints of the Gods, Keeper Of Genesis, Heaven’s Mirror*, and other bestselling investigations of historical mysteries. His recent work focuses on shamanism and the origins of religion. His 2005 book *Supernatural: Meetings with The Ancient Teachers of Mankind*, suggests that experiences in altered states of consciousness have played a fundamental role in the evolution of human culture and that other realities not normally accessible to our senses may surround us at all times. While researching *Supernatural*, his experiences with the ayahuasca lead to his first novel, *Entangled*. His latest book *War God* was published earlier this year. His books have sold more than five million copies worldwide and have been translated into twenty-seven languages.