

'It was like a psychedelic trip': Neurosurgeon describes coma and near-death-experience

In 2008, Dr. Eben Alexander contracted a rare case of bacterial meningitis. As the pathogen wracked his brain, causing it to swell and suffuse with pus, Alexander entered a deep coma. He was not expected to survive. But live he did, and with a tale to tell. For in Alexander's stricken state, he underwent a [near-death experience](#), a profound out-of-body event. Four years later, the neurosurgeon detailed it in a best-selling book.

"I had no real center of consciousness," he wrote. "I didn't know who or what I was or even if I was. I was simply... there, a singular awareness in the midst of a soupy, dark, muddy nothingness..."

More recently, Alexander's popular account of his near-death experience attracted the attention of [Pascal Michael](#), a PhD student in psychology at the University of Greenwich. Michael met Alexander after seeing him speak at an academic conference and was informed that Alexander had experimented with 5-MeO-DMT, a psychedelic closely related to DMT, secreted from the glands of the Colorado River toad.

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As Michael's current academic focus is on comparing the psychedelic experience with the near-death experience, he was intrigued. It's widely theorized that the psychedelic drug N,N-dimethyltryptamine, more commonly known as DMT, could [cause the near-death experience](#), since the brain might be flooded with it as we approach the moment of death.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the full article here**](#)