

BIG (SPACE) BROTHERS

BY JEROME CLARK

John E. Mack, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, April 1994. 432p.

You have a sensitivity. . . . You pick up on things. You can talk to the earth. The earth talks to you. . . . Listen to the earth. . . . You can hear the anguish of the spirits. You can hear the wailing cries of the imbalances. It will save you."

Who is speaking here? No, not the well-tanned host of a New Age infomercial. No, not some wacky tree-hugger. No, not one of Orfeo Angelucci's space pals, though you're getting warmer, no doubt because at some point in your life you read either Chapter Two of Angelucci's *The Secret of the Saucers* (1955) or Carl Jung's discussion of same in the epilogue to *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (1959).

No, the communicator of the above-articulated twaddle is an alien named "Ohgeeka" or "Ageeka," planet or dimension of origin unspecified, in the newly published *Abduction*. The author, psychiatrist and *IUR* contributor ("Helping Abductees," July/August 1992) John E. Mack, is—as most of you know by now—a Pulitzer Prize-winning psychobiographer (of T. E. Lawrence) and a professor at the Cambridge Hospital, Harvard Medical School. He is friends with many of America's brightest intellectual lights. He is also a friend of Carl Sagan. He is, from all indications including my own limited experience with him, a genuinely nice man. He is also a brave one. UFO research, not for the faint of heart under the best of circumstances, is in Mack's circles an all-but-unimaginable act of intellectual defiance.

For these reasons and others, not the least of them its publisher's fat promotional budget, *Abduction* may be destined to become the most widely read UFO book since 1987's *Communion*, with which it has much in common, even down to rectal probes. Mack subscribes to at least one of Whitley Strieber's views of the abduction phenomenon (about which Strieber has entertained, at one time or another, virtually every view it is possible for a single representative of *Homo sapiens* to entertain): that abduction-generated terror and trauma are initiatory ordeals at the other side of which one learns that the aliens are sensitive New Age dudes. Ohgeeka/Ageeka would feel comfortable in the company of Angelucci's ETs, who were given to saying

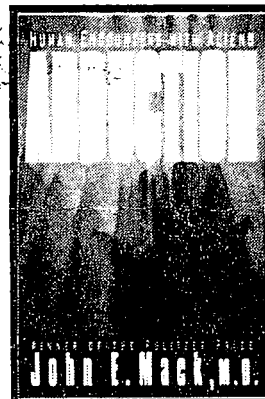
things like, "Weep, Orfeo. Let tears unblind your eyes. For at this moment we weep with you for Earth and her Children. For all its apparent beauty Earth is a purgatorial world among the planets evolving intelligent life. Hate, selfishness and cruelty rise from many parts of it like a dark mist."

ACTING WITH GOD

To one of my tastes a little of this goes a long way. Yet such misanthropy—which is what it amounts to—has had an enduring appeal both to contactee-oriented saucerians and to ufologists (Donald Keyhoe and Stanton Friedman, for two prominent examples) who have rejected contactees but embraced their message: human race bad, alien visitors good. If they do nothing else (and in my opinion they do do nothing else), these notions supply aid and comfort to critics who contend that scientific pretensions notwithstanding, UFO research is at its core a religious quest. Stated this baldly, the claim misrepresents what UFO research is about; worse, it is often employed as a rhetorical strategy which enables critics to dodge the real scientific questions UFO research raises. Still, the charge is true enough in some specific cases.

Such as John Mack's. Here no extrapolation whatever is necessary. You can find it in black and white, in one form or another, on just about every page. Take page 200: "If, in fact, the alien beings are closer to the divine source or *anima mundi* than human beings generally seem to be, then it is possible that their presence among us, however cruel and traumatic in some instances, may be part of a larger process that is bringing us back to God." On page 329 Mack quotes approvingly an abductee's assertion that the aliens are "acting with God." The 13 abductees whose stories comprise the bulk of this long book tell how that is supposed to be happening.

Much of what we read here is the familiar abduction phenomenon documented by Thomas E. Bullard, Budd Hopkins, David M. Jacobs, and, in recent months, MUFON's abduction-transcription project (*MUFON UFO Journal*, February and March issues). Much of the rest of it is unique, or so it seems at first reflection, only in its prominence. In his



Jerome Clark is editor of IUR and vice president of CUFOS. His most recent book is Unexplained! (1993).

massive 1987 survey of more than 300 abduction narratives through 1985, Bullard took note of an aspect he called "theophany," characterizing it¹ as the "strangest and rarest episode in abduction reports"; in such encounters experiencers confront "seemingly divine powers." He found only six instances, and—as was not the case in other aspects of abduction experience—few common elements among them.

It is Kenneth Ring's *The Omega Project* (1992) that *Abduction* most resembles, at least in the overall conclusions it draws. Both books are broadly speculative, but Ring's at least begins with empirical data compiled from psychological testing of those he calls "UFO experiencers" (UFOers), including abductees, and it convincingly eliminates mundane explanations (such as fantasy-proneness) before launching into a less convincing attempt to link UFO and other anomalous experiences (primarily of the near-death variety) with planetary consciousness expansion. Mack gives alternative explanations hardly more than a sidelong glance. Nonetheless both his abductees and Ring's anomaly-experiencers report an enhanced spiritual and ecological awareness.

Yet in Ring's book case histories appear only spottily, and nearly always in fragments, so it is not clear how many of these are really "abductions" as ordinarily understood or other kinds of experiences, such as those associated with contactees. Most ufologists have tended to treat abductions as a separate category of experience from that claimed by contactees, for the same reason preabduction-era ufologists saw CE3s as fundamentally different from contact stories. Whereas CE3 witnesses reported little communication, seemed genuinely troubled by the encounter, did not seek publicity, and generally had the social profile of other kinds of UFO witnesses, contactees actively sought meetings with angelic extraterrestrials, often had personal histories in occultism (and sometimes confidence crime), and all too keenly lusted after publicity and profit. There was nothing to link contactees with UFOs as such. For them UFOs only provided a pop-culture cover for a mystical vision or a money-making scheme. To most modern ufologists abductions have seemed more a variety of CE3 than a latter-day contact claim. Betty Hill, after all, is no George Adamski.

EVIDENCE ABSENCE

But consider these words from Isabel Davis's classic essay "Meet the Extraterrestrial" (*Fantastic Universe*, November 1957), in which she outlined the difference between occupant reports (as CE3s were then called) and contact claims: In the former, Davis observed, the aliens "never *communicate* at all. They utter no lofty messages, no explanations of ancient riddles, no admonitions, warnings, reassurances, prophecies, or esoteric doctrine."

Mack's abduction humanoids do virtually all of the above. His cases fuse themes from CE3s (not-human entities doing not-human things) and contact claims (benevolent

New Age aliens working to save earth and earthlings). From simply a narrative point of view, Mack's accounts aren't nearly so boring as the latter, but they are less credible than the former. The best-documented CE3s (Valensole, Socorro, Kelly-Hopkinsville, Boianai) cause us to think anomalous *events* of some kind occurred, whereas Mack's informants, the sincerity of all of whom I am prepared to grant, are telling wild and fantastic stories of the sort I think of as *experience anomalies*—tales of extraordinary encounters which, if literally interpreted, would require us to reinvent the world; yet even as they resist conventional accounting, they exist only as memory and testimony. They may be authentic in some sense, but that does not necessarily make them valid.

In other words, to say that ordinary explanations fail—and so far all proposed counterexplanations have indeed failed—ought not therefore to give us free rein to reach for the most extreme possible conclusions. Nonetheless Mack here demands as our response to these tales nothing less than the wholesale rejection of the "Western scientific/materialist world," an entity Mack, who possesses some remarkable political opinions (about which more shortly), does not like very much. He asks us to overturn the world as we know it because some people tell bizarre yet curiously consistent stories, mostly under hypnosis, and exhibit a marked degree of stress as they do so. They may suffer, too, from permanent trauma for which there appears no other cause than the one alleged: terrifying, intrusive encounters with otherworldly beings.

These considerations surely are sufficient to justify further investigation but at this juncture not much more. And when some of these same individuals erupt into past-life memories (or, in one instance, "recall" being at the site of a Roswell-like UFO crash), the question is not whether con-fabulation is going on but how much.

There is some evidence here that something is going on beyond hypnotically induced fantasy: a body of consciously recalled testimony, a handful of independently observed UFO sightings which apparently correlate with claimed abductions, a few abduction episodes in which more than one witness figures. But Mack makes little of these and shows only modest interest in investigative efforts that require more than interaction with abductees in his home or office, and so these crucial issues, which touch on the basic question of whether anything really *happened*, pass in and out of the text so quickly that the inattentive reader risks missing them.

As to other kinds of more direct evidence, Mack writes complacently (p. 41), "The physical phenomena that accompany abductions are important, but gain their significance primarily in that they corroborate the experiences themselves; for the effects tend to be subtle and would not by themselves convince a Western-trained clinician of their meaning. For example, even though the abductees are certain that the cuts, scars, scoop marks, and small fresh ulcers . . . are related to the physical procedures performed on the

ships, these lesions are too trivial by themselves to be medically significant. Similarly, abductees will often experience that they have been pregnant and have had the pregnancy removed during an abduction, but there is not yet a case where a physician has documented that a fetus has disappeared in relation to an abduction." Analyses of alleged implants recovered from a small number of abductees reveal nothing out of the ordinary.

Right or wrong, one immediately obvious explanation for the absence of significant physical evidence is that abductions are not physical events but imagined ones. Mack, however, holds forth for a far more extraordinary answer: To hope for conclusive physical evidence, he says (p. 43), "may even be a sort of 'error of logical types.' In other words it may be wrong to expect that a phenomenon whose very nature is subtle, and one of whose purposes may be to stretch and expand our ways of knowing beyond the purely materialist approaches of Western science, will yield its secrets to an epistemology or methodology that operates at a lower level of consciousness."

I suppose this could be true, but I wouldn't count on it. To start with, it starts on a slippery slope. From it one could plead for just about anything, including—a cynic might have it—the existence of the celebrated immaterial being named Santa Claus. All one has to do is what Mack does here: assume that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The assumption undercuts just about any hope for rational inquiry and understanding. Moreover, where the larger UFO phenomenon is concerned, it is demonstrably false. The open literature—not to mention whatever classified technical reports there may be on the Roswell debris—provides us with a body of impressive evidence bolstering the hypothesis that UFOs are physical and extraordinarily anomalous. Physical-trace and radar/visual cases are eminently investigable and documentable via the methodology of Western science.

In fact, as I have remarked elsewhere, ufologists pay heed to the abduction phenomenon precisely because of its ostensible relationship to the UFO phenomenon of CE2s, instrumented observations, photographs, multiple witnesses, and trained observers. On its own the abduction evidence is thin stuff, intriguing but inconclusive, resistant so far to conventional psychiatric diagnosis but compromised by its association with hypnosis—and now by the murky controversies over false memories, Satanic ritual abuse (SRA), and the like. Mack does not touch on these latter at all, not even long enough to deny, even perfunctorily, their relevance to the abduction question. Yet as both abductees and SRA "victims" come in droves out of the woodwork, both claiming repressed memories in support of whose veridicality we have only ambiguous supporting evidence (if that), a lot of sober reflection seems in order.

What *Abduction* gives us instead is a good dose of Mack's peculiar political beliefs, which one in due course suspects affect not only his interpretation of the abduction

question but his abductees' as well. Worse, one fears that they influence the abductees' sense of what they experienced. The aliens Mack finds, in other words, turn out to be the aliens Mack was looking for.

These are not the alien abductors of whom Jacobs wrote in *Secret Life* (1992, p. 233): "They express no interest in [the abductee's] personal, social, or family relationships, except as they bear on the breeding program [the creation of alien/human hybrids]. They express no interest in politics, culture, economics, or the rich and extraordinarily complex tapestry that makes up human relationships and societies. They do not ask even idle questions about this. They do, however, express interest in birth control, smoking, and health problems that might directly relate to childbearing for women." From his own group of abductees, Jacobs would conclude that the abductors have the same relationship to abductees that laboratory technicians have to white rats. Whatever courtesy or kindness they exhibit is simply to alleviate abductees' fears and thus render them easier to manipulate.

Jacobs's humanoids are recognizable cousins of the humanoids of traditional CE3 lore. Mack's come out of the contactee universe. They may be rougher in their methods than Adamski's Space Brothers, but they are Space Brothers nonetheless, albeit with updated and more fashionable concerns: pollution this time, not atomic bombs. Abductees suffer terror, intense physical pain sometimes bordering on torture, disrupted lives, anxiety, depression, anger, sexual violation and attendant dysfunction, unsought pregnancies, and other miseries—but all that's okay, according to Mack, because in the end these indignities are for the ultimate benefit of individual abductees and the whole darned human race, which direly needs to be saved from . . . well, you'll never guess.

CURE OR DISEASE?

I have met Mack once in my life, at a conference in Santa Barbara, California, in November 1990. Though we talked about UFOs and abductions, I remember practically nothing of what either of us had to say on those subjects. I do, however, recall a conversation on another matter of mutual interest, politics and world affairs. In the course of that conversation, I understood Mack to say that anti-Communism is a form of racism.

I eventually decided I could not have heard him right. Otherwise I would have been forced to conclude he subscribed to an opinion so preposterous that only a Harvard professor could hold it. The rise of totalitarianism in our century is one of the great tragedies of all human history. Under Communism (in particular during the murderous regimes of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot) tens of millions of human beings were killed, and those who managed to survive under it lived—and live, in those places Communism survives, merely temporarily one hopes—in con-

trolled, oppressive circumstances. *Not* to oppose such evil seems to me, as a democrat, a liberal, and a child of the Enlightenment, at the very least an act of shocking moral obtuseness.

My three-plus-year-old conversation with Mack came back to me as I was reading *Abduction*, which is loaded with hand-wringing pronouncements on humanity's failings versus the aliens' superior moral wisdom. There is no question about what Mack regards as the supreme evil of our era, and it is not totalitarianism, which is not once mentioned. On page 10, introducing a theme to which he continually returns, Mack remarks, "UFO abductions have been reported and collected most frequently in Western countries or countries dominated by Western culture and values. Insofar as the abduction phenomenon may be seen as occurring in the context of the global ecological crisis, which is an outcome of the Western materialist/dualistic worldview, it may be that its 'medicine' is being administered primarily where it is most needed—in the United States and the other Western industrial countries."

All non-Western cultures are treated with appropriate piety. Unlike the planet-plunderers of the Western-European tradition, American Indians are "close to the earth," according to an alien (p. 287; these words are supposed to have been uttered in the course of a UFO encounter *which occurred in a past life*). Tibetan lamas and their Buddhist beliefs show up here and there in the text, always in a context that depicts them as victims of Western arrogance and ignorance, never—as in the unblinking truth—victims of a brutal Chinese Communist occupation which threatens their culture far more gravely than any amount of Western apathy ever could. Mack's selective telling of this sorry tale has led my friend and *MUFON UFO Journal* editor Dennis Stacy to speculate that maybe Mack thinks the "rape of Tibet by the Chinese was actually led by a secret cabal of corporate capitalists."

If the aliens indeed are here to save the earth from environmental apocalypse, they ought to direct their attention elsewhere. It is not much needed in the West, where environmentalism flourishes and plays a large role in public and private decision-making about air, water, and land use, species preservation, and technological development. Protection of nature has become as much a Western value as capitalism and democracy. The world's most egregious ecological horrors are to be found in the nations and republics of the former Soviet empire and in the Third World (for a disturbing account of what is happening to the ecology—and thus to the people—of Africa, read Robert D. Kaplan's "The Coming Anarchy" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994). In Third World states environmentalists are often themselves an endangered species, harassed and on occasion even murdered by governments or powerful private interests more concerned with unrestrained exploitation than protection of natural resources.

In any event, whatever else Mack would have you

believe, pollution is a consequence of industrialization, not of capitalism. In the modern world, nations with free markets have, on the whole, the cleanest environmental records. Maybe Mack's aliens just aren't doing their homework.

Throughout the book one reads accounts of appalling abuse of human beings, including children, by alleged aliens. These accounts are followed by the abductees' expression of love for, and even identification with, their tormentors. Some even fantasize they themselves are aliens; those who cannot make that imaginative leap content themselves with the conviction that they are conduits through whom the aliens' message will spread to those of us who have been blinded by the Enlightenment. Mack approves wholly, even hinting that he may be a part of the big cosmic game plan.

Mack believes that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. If one rejects the values of the Western tradition, one can excuse the conduct of an all-powerful state, or an all-powerful alien intelligence, which cannot be troubled to treat human beings with decent regard. Cruelty counts as mere detail when the end is noble—as, of course, tyrants and terrorists always say it is and sometimes even believe it is. Those victims who embrace their tormentors bring to mind the protagonist of Orwell's *1984*; after prolonged torture and overwhelming psychological assault, he decided he "loved Big Brother." Is it any wonder that Mack's abductees love their Space Brothers?

One may agree or disagree with Jacobs and Hopkins on whether abduction experiences represent real-life interactions with extraterrestrials. But one never doubts where their sympathies lie: firmly on the side that favors the dignity of individual human beings. Their outrage is focused where it belongs. Mack's focus, on the other hand, is severely blurred.

The ontological status of abduction experiences is yet undetermined, of course. Whatever else it may accomplish, Mack's book should serve to remind us that it is dangerous to entertain "too much ambition in our search for answers," as Bullard once remarked of abduction research generally. "We are often better off settling for small, obtainable answers along the way toward that big but distant one."

Serious abduction study is in its infancy. Let us let it grow up. In the meantime, let it be said that the aliens Mack would have us follow look not just unbelievable but undeserving of belief. One wishes profoundly for their nonexistence or, barring that, their absence. ♦

New Stringfield Status Report

Veteran UFO researcher Leonard H. Stringfield has produced his *seventh* Status Report on UFO crash/retrievals, featuring new information that surfaced in 1993. Published in February 1994 and entitled *UFO Crash/Retrievals: Search for Proof in a Hall of Mirrors*, the 67-page monograph may be ordered for \$16.50 from The Center for UFO Studies, 2457 W. Peterson, Chicago, IL 60659.

10 Heathwood Circle
Columbia, SC 29205
May 24, 1994

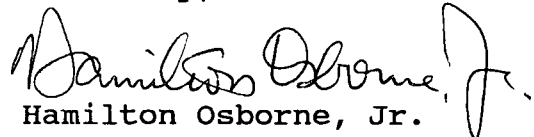
Dr. John E. Mack
The Cambridge Hospital
1493 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Dr. Mack:

Enclosed is a copy of a review of your book, *Abduction*, that appeared in the most recent edition of *International UFO Reporter*, published by the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) in Chicago.

I thought that you might want to read it.

Sincerely,


Hamilton Osborne, Jr.