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JOHN MACK

"I didn't realize that I was having sex with aliens until just a few months ago," Peter Faust is saying over coffee in the living room of his Watertown, Mass., home. "Things unfold: it went from sperm samples to knowing that it had something to do with hybrid children, to knowing that my sperm was somehow being used with extraterrestrials, to seeing myself with an extraterrestrial female."

Humans report abduction by aliens! Harvard psychiatrist swears it's true!

By Stephen Rae

This tapestry unfolded over the course of a year and a half and eight hypnosis sessions with a Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist named John E. Mack.

Faust wasn't the only one telling Mack stories. Over the last few years, nearly 100 other U.F.O. "abductees" found their way to him, and told the 64-year-old psychiatrist at Cambridge Hospital stories as bizarre as any he'd encountered in more than 30 years on the wards. Time and time again he heard of people being floated through walls on beams of light into spaceships, and of people lying paralyzed on tables under alien assault. He was told of "tagging" devices implanted in sinuses and eyeballs removed and put back. From the descriptions of the fetuslike aliens — known, in U.F.O. parlance, as Grays — to the experiments they performed, the sex was nonstop: men told of anal probes and forced sperm-taking; women, artificial insemination and removal of embryos. Mack heard that a human-alien hybrid race was being created on the ships: listless, huge-eyed, wispy-haired children that look like Keane paintings on chemo.

For a Freudian psychoanalyst, this material was compelling. Mack's interest in these patients, and the book he was writing about them, would not have caused a stir.

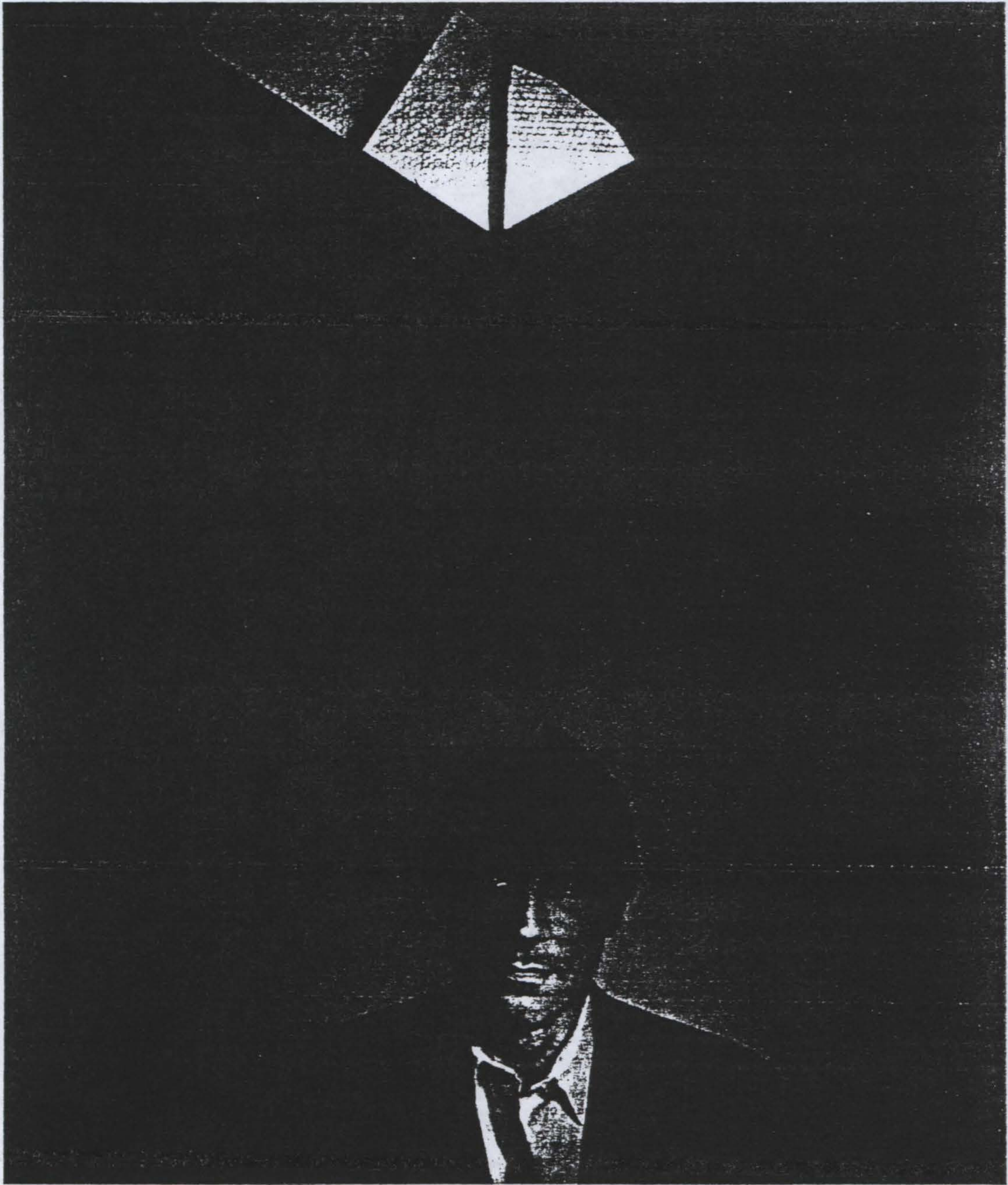
Except that he believed them.

THERE HAS BEEN A SPATE OF BOOKS ON HUMAN encounters with extraterrestrials — most notably Whitley Strieber's 1987 "Communion," the best-selling book with the big-eyed alien on the cover. But none by an author with the credentials of John Mack, whose book "Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens" is to be published next month by Scribners.

"I really knew when I first talked with them that this was something that I could not explain psychiatrically," Mack says of his patients. He is in his tiny office, just large enough for a desk and chair, a couch and a Tibetan tanka. "It didn't sound like it behaved like anything that had a psychiatric origin. It behaved like a trauma." And traumas come from *outside*. Mack, the author of the classic "Nightmares and Human Conflict," also was convinced these stories weren't dreams: They had a narrative consistency, within themselves and from person to person. He was sure his abductees were not making up stories to get attention. "They don't *want* to believe it! It's the *last* thing they want! They want to be told that this is a dream, that this is even madness." What strikes a visitor most about him are his hands: always in motion, painting pictures, grabbing at you, trying to bring you into his vision.

We are talking in the Macht Building, the red-brick home of Cambridge Hospital's renowned psychiatry department. It might have been called the Mack Building, after its founding director, if a psychiatrist named Macht hadn't died first and if Mack's colleagues hadn't feared their beloved professor had gone mad. Of course, people thought Mack was crazy back in the early 60's, too, when he joined the derelict municipal

Photograph by Dan Winters for The New York Times



facility. But then Harvard, in a stab at town-gown rapprochement, affiliated with the hospital. Clearly, Mack was anything but nuts. He built the psychiatry department from scratch and helped turn around the other departments, earning much of the credit for shaping the hospital in to another jewel in Harvard's teaching crown.

Later, Mack, a German Jew from New York, would cut a quixotic figure on a camel, traipsing around Jordan to research the psychoanalytic biography of T. E. Lawrence that would win a Pulitzer Prize in 1977. "I was traveling among the Bedouin, trying to get the principles of diplomacy and negotiation, which I would then come back and apply to the City Council here," he says. Mack was always bridging something. In 1980 he even met with Yasir Arafat in a Beirut safe house.

In 1983, Mack and Robert Jay Lifton, a Yale psychiatrist, founded the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age as a Harvard Medical School affiliate. Now called the Center for Psychology and Social Change, it shifted perceptions of the psychodynamics of human conflict, bringing into currency concepts like "us vs. them." It connected Russians and Americans, Arabs and Jews, and helped them to acknowledge the sense of victimization of the "other" and to challenge the cultural identity that said, "I exist in opposition to you."

"He really is, you know, a do-gooder," a friend says. And always a seeker. "In medical school, he was the first to get into psychoanalysis, and he had not just one psychoanalysis but two." Mack's identification with Lawrence was so intense that friends read his book in part as self-analysis. "[Lawrence] had certain confusions of identity similar to mine," Mack agrees. "What fascinated me was the resonance between the inner world and the acted-out, political world, and how we try to transform the world according to our inner struggles and needs." He quotes Lawrence's famous vision of a "new commonwealth," in which "white and red and yellow and brown and black will stand up together ... in the service of the world." Given that Mack's "Abduction" is likely to obscure all his past accomplishments, this could also be his epitaph — if you add the Gray.

EVEN BEFORE HIS WORK WITH U.F.O. abductees, Mack's quest led him down what are considered heretical paths. It was a stunner when this prominent member of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute questioned psychoanalysis. "I think there are places the Freudian system has trouble going," he says, citing dissatisfaction with his own analyses and their "endless" rehashing of childhood events. For an emerging activist, the rarefied air of psychoanalysis — the blank screen, the silence, the mirroring — was stultifying.

Then Mack found EST. "He was very struck by how powerful these large-group experiences could be on the workings of people's lives, including his own," says Dr. Edward Khantzian, a longtime colleague. "And I told John way back then that I think he discovered the power of groups too late in his career and was too, uh, taken in." Mack served on EST's board of directors, and in 1982 he brought Werner Erhard to Harvard to speak. "It raised eyebrows because people saw Erhard as a con man," Khantzian says. "I was given a terrible time by the powers that be," Mack admits.

'They don't *want* to believe it,' Mack says. 'It's the *last* thing they want.'

Some of the people who told Mack they had contact with extraterrestrials.

In 1987, at a United States-Soviet conference of physicians at the Esalen Institute, he met Stanislav Grof, a Czech-born psychiatrist who had written much about LSD and consciousness expansion. Grof and his wife, Christina, had developed a therapy they called holotropic breathwork. It used Eastern breathing techniques and percussive music to produce LSD-like changes in consciousness without the legal risks.

Mack found it revelatory. "I became in touch profoundly with the loss of my mother as an infant and my father's grief at the time," he says. Grof's system of transpersonal psychology also smashed the boundary constraints imposed by psychoanalysis, recognizing that in any human connection, a "co-creation" or "commingling of consciousness" goes on.

Mack plunged into Eastern philosophy and shamanism. He read Huxley's "Doors of Perception" and Castaneda's "Teachings of Don Juan." A straight-ahead guy who passed up the chance to take LSD in the 50's, when it was offered to Harvard psychiatric residents as a way to mimic a schizophrenic state, Mack had sat out the 60's drugfest. He made up for that now.

The John Mack who emerged from these explorations was possessed of the notion that humanity's present predicament was rooted in the 300-year-old paradigm of Western dualism, which severed awareness of connection to one another, the environment and the cosmos; and in materialism, which cuts off spiritual realms. Every previous culture has accepted "a huge range of entities and gods and spirits" who share our universe," Mack says.

So Mack was predisposed to seeing entities the winter day in 1990 that he met Budd Hopkins, father of the U.F.O. abduction movement. Hopkins showed Mack the proof he'd amassed: photos of strange scars and scoop marks and a collection of symbols seen on the alien ships. Mack met people who said they'd been abducted and came away convinced. "They were very straightforward, healthy-minded folks who had had these unusual experiences," he recalls. "Their stories jibed, and as far as I could tell, they hadn't heard this from anybody else, and it all seemed very real."

And he was fascinated by the entities. "They seem to act like spirit beings much of the time," Mack observes. Yet they "penetrate and enter the physical world, and to that extent they're a little different from spirit entities."

Mack began seeing abductees that spring. Ignoring friends' pleas that he "stay in the closet with this one," he delivered papers at U.F.O. conferences and was elected to the board of directors of the Mutual U.F.O. Network. He was a consultant on the "Intruders" TV movie, in which Richard Crenna, as a psychiatrist who discovers abductees among his patients, played a Mack-Hopkins hybrid. And he contributed the foreword to "Secret Life: Firsthand Accounts of U.F.O. Abductions," by David M. Jacobs, a Temple University historian.

"A huge, strange interspecies or interbeing breeding program has invaded our physical reality and is affecting the lives of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people," Mack wrote.

"Oliver Stone, call your office," The New Republic jeered.

IT WOULD TAKE ALL OF MACK'S diplomatic skills to reconcile the ultimate us-them: terrestrial vs. extraterrestrial. To help abductees shed their isolation, Mack set up the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research. He helped them recover memories in hypnotic screamathons. When combined with breathwork, Mack says, hypnosis undoes the repression of memory imposed by the aliens. As the traumas are brought to consciousness, relived with "feelings of terror, rage and grief as intense as any I have encountered as a psychiatrist," their power was dissipated.

It was tougher to overcome what he calls ontological shock, "the bleak realization that what they have experienced actually occurred and that reality as they have defined it is forever altered." Most abductees came to Mack plagued by what they call vivid dreams and what Mack calls denial. The "undoing of denial," he writes, is effected by having the abductee stare into the "engulfing, searching eyes" of the alien. "This will make them real and remove, once and for all, the denial that has operated as a psychological defense." With the end of denial comes a "shift in their relation to the alien beings," Mack found. A more reciprocal and "even loving" relationship evolves; us-themness diminishes. The more communicative aliens may impart "useful information about fundamental ecological and global dangers," like nuclear war. For Mack, ever the diplomat, the key was to stop fighting.

Describing one abductee's experience, Mack writes, once he "surrendered," he was enlightened about "the way humans are conducting themselves here in terms of international politics, our environment, our violence to each other, our food and all that" — by an alien who sounds just like Mack.

If this smacks of "commingling" or "co-creation of consciousness," Mack disputes the notion. "That would imply that I'm creating the ideas," he says venemently. "These people are

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very hard to lead. You throw curves at them: 'Was the hair brown or yellow?' No hair. You can't influence them. This idea that the hypnotist somehow leads them is just not the way it is."

He acknowledges that it is possible to implant false memories under hypnosis, but only memories of inconsequential events — an issue at the center of fierce debates over recovered memories of Satanic cults and childhood sexual abuse. The people at Mack's research program tell me of a Cambridge Hospital psychiatrist whose studies back up this assertion, but in what I've noticed to be a trend among Mack's colleagues, he doesn't return my phone calls.

"NOBODY BELIEVES IT," SNAPS DR. Malkah Notman in her Cambridge Hospital office. She is acting chairwoman of the psychiatry department and Mack's boss. "I wish he were doing something else. This is so offbase." Like other Mack colleagues who don't dodge me, Notman gives the clear impression that she would rather be swallowing glass. "I think it's part of an ongoing search that he's had for issues he defines as spiritual," she ventures sympathetically. "It fits in with his interest in EST and even the nuclear and nationalism issues — you know, a kind of international presence or cooperation."

Mack is increasingly being compared with Timothy Leary, who gave LSD for homework and was dismissed from Harvard in 1963. But Mack's tenure and issues of academic freedom would insure his right to research.

"I don't know any of his colleagues who would say, 'You gotta stop this,' " Notman declares, drawing a line between believing in someone's work and letting him pursue it, "as long as it doesn't cause any harm."

But some worry that Mack may indeed be causing harm. "We're terribly concerned that he is hurting himself, his patients and psychiatry," says a friend who attributes Mack's recent separation from his wife of 34 years to his abduction "obsession." He raises the specter of Wilhelm Reich, the psychiatrist whose notions about orgone energy destroyed his career.

"I would almost buy the Brooklyn Bridge from him," Philip J. Klass says of Mack. Klass, the publisher of the Skeptics U.F.O. Newsletter, says the abductees are not crazy. Those he's met are just "people seeking celebrity status," people who would never otherwise be invited on Oprah Winfrey's show. "They are, he says, "little nobodies."

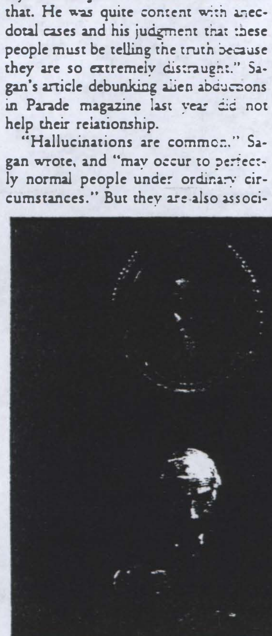
Carl Sagan, a longtime acquaintance who had once donned a blindfold and headphones and breathed rapidly and deeply to evocative rhythms when Mack got into breathwork, is also concerned. In 1991 he came up from Cornell University to discuss the validity of the alien abduction claims.

"I tried to argue that on issues of this importance, extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence," Sagan says. "And John would have none of that. He was quite content with anecdotal cases and his judgment that these people must be telling the truth because they are so extremely distraught." Sagan's article debunking alien abductions in Parade magazine last year did not help their relationship.

"Hallucinations are common," Sagan wrote, and "may occur to perfectly normal people under ordinary circumstances." But they are also associated with sleep paralysis, a little-known but surprisingly prevalent occurrence, striking at least 8 percent of the population. In twilight states between sleep and wakefulness, people may feel paralyzed and sense strange presences. Sexual stimulation is often reported, a result of a diminished flow of oxygen to the brain. In the Middle Ages, these presences were called succubi and incubi. Later, fairies were said to paralyze and rape human victims.

"Is it possible that people in all times and places occasionally experience vivid, realistic hallucinations, often with sexual content — with the details filled in by the prevailing cultural idioms sucked out of the Zeitgeist?" Sagan asked.

His friend was kind. Others will be less so. But Mack is almost mystically detached and certain that he is right.



'They are little nobodies,' Philip Klass, professional skeptic, says of the abductees.

The abductees aren't crazy, Klass maintains. They're just hungry for celebrity.

"WE'RE PREPARING FOR AN ONslaught here," says Vivienne Simon, executive director of the Center for Psychology and Social Change. "When you have a Harvard professor who is saying these people aren't crazy, and not only are they not crazy, but I've been able to help them, and in some cases actually embrace it, then you've got a flood of people" at the door, she says.

In anticipation of the tsunami, a new telephone system has been installed to route callers: abductees to one extension to leave confidential messages; therapists to the network coordinator; abductees who want to be studied to the research department; overseas callers to the international coordinator; journalists to the program director.

"A year ago my board was flipping out about this," says Simon, a 43-year-old lawyer who used to coordinate Greenpeace's campaign against the nuclear industry. "I've watched a tremendous change, from when people were afraid John was losing his mind to the point where they are really beginning to understand."

(That might have something to do with why some members of the board of directors left.)

JOHN MACK IS NOT *ALL* alone. Some colleagues who have met his patients at grand rounds and less formal settings come away scratching their heads. Khantzian recalls a woman who seemed "quite responsive and available and connected — all those nice, healthy things." He says a common reaction to a Mack case conference is "I went in disbelieving and I came out not knowing what to believe."

Though Mack may be "on the front lines of abductee research," as his book jacket puts it, he's got lots of company in the rear guard. "There is what is sometimes called the Hidden College" of U.F.O. abduction researchers, an M.I.T. physicist says — a sort of closet intelligentsia. "But they keep their heads down, they don't want their names in the papers."

As is true of most other U.F.O. abductees who have been studied, psychological tests suggest that Peter Faust isn't crazy. Nor is his story all that unusual. A 1991 Roper survey revealed that 2 percent of American adults had experienced four or five of the "strong indicators" of having been abducted.

And John Mack has made Peter Faust and others feel better. Between Faust's first meeting with Mack, when he remembered abductions from childhood, and his third, in which he saw the "little black chip" implanted in his brain, he felt abandoned and helpless. But after that "dark night of the soul," the 36-year-old acupuncturist came to know that he was "connected to something infinitely wiser and more powerful than I could understand, that the phenomenon had some meaning that was greater than just me and the sperm sample."

Subsequent regressions taught Faust, who has a psychotherapist to help him deal with what he uncovers with Mack, that the aliens were "longing to connect." More recently he discovered the extraterrestrial girlfriend he'd been breeding with "for eons." More striking was the vision he had of *himself* as an alien.

"A new breed or 'tribe,' a hybrid form, is being created between the alien race or races and human beings," Mack, ever hopeful, proclaims in his book. "Peter and other men and women like him with a dual alien-human identity, appears to be playing a vital role . . . breeding with an alien or hybrid mate to produce offspring that would be able to survive in some sort of post-apocalyptic future."

Membership in this vanguard may have its privileges, but it leaves Faust with questions. "Did John's spiritual bent affect all of us, or did our experiences influence him?" he asks.

"Is it real? I'm always left with: How much of my memories are real? Is some of it the book I read 20 years ago that is somehow lurking in my deepest memory? Are my memories true or are some of them true and other ones part of psychologically transferring a father figure onto John and trying to please him and stay the center of attention — is that part of it, or are my regressions, each one, part of my reality and part of my experience?

"Believe me," he says. "That's why I'm in therapy." ■