

A Disturbing Look at 'Alien Abductions'

BY MICHAEL BERRY

The idea of alien abductions runs so counter to the beliefs of most people that the very mention of the subject often produces eye-rolling jokes about the fate of Elvis Presley.

But after reading John E. Mack's strange and disturbing "Abduction: Human Encounters

BOOKS

With Aliens," some folks might not be so quick to laugh.

A professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a Pulitzer Prize-winner for "A Prince of Disorder," his biography of T.E. Lawrence, Mack has spent four

years working with more than 100 patients who allege contact with aliens.

"Of these, 76 . . . fulfill my quite strict criteria for an authentic abduction case: conscious recall or recall with the help of hypnosis, of being taken by alien beings into a strange craft, reported with emotion appropriate to the experience being described and no apparent

Abductions: Human Encounters With Aliens

By John E. Mack, M.D.

Charles Scribner's Sons; 352 pages; \$20

mental condition that could account for the story."

From those abductees, Mack presents 13 case histories, eight

men and five women. They range from Jerry, a self-described "ordinary housewife" who's terrified of marital sex because of abduction-related trauma, to Joe, a psychotherapist convinced that he and his son possess both human and alien identities.

Mack narrates the facts of each case, relying heavily on direct quotes, before offering his own interpretations.

His patients uniformly tell of incredible events, of seeing UFOs and meeting their humanoid crews, of being subjected to invasive, frequently humiliating physical examinations and surgery, of witnessing hybrid embryos taken from their bodies.

They speak of being shown apocalyptic visions, learning about past lives and experiencing time travel.

Two major elements separate "Abductions" from the aliens-among-us nonfiction pack. First is the lack of sensationalism in Mack's presentation. Initially a skeptic, he charts his own growing belief in the phenomenon, becoming convinced by the sincerity of his patients and their apparent absence of psychopathology.

He takes time to ponder whether his own preconceptions are shaping their testimony, concluding that the subjects all refuse to be led into obvious contradictions in their testimony.

Metaphysical Shift

"Abductions" also stands out in its exploration of the metaphysical aspects of abduction. Again and again, abductees claim that the aliens are intensely concerned about the ecological collapse of our planet and that what's required to prevent or survive it is a fundamental shift in human consciousness and spirituality.

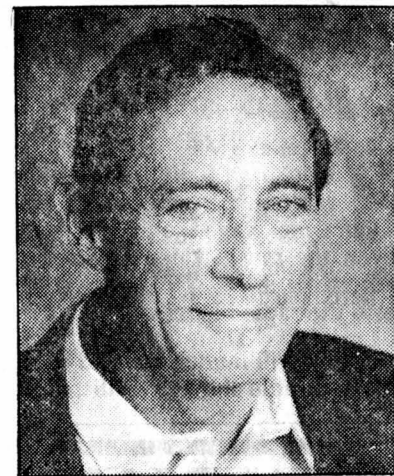
It is difficult to argue with the notion that Earth teeters on the brink of annihilation. Whether there are nonhuman, intelligent agencies working to forestall Domsday or mop up after it, is unprovable.

Mack recognizes the lack of hard evidence. "I do not expect that the material presented in this book will have much impact on the minds of those who believe that the laws of physics as encompassed by the Newtonian/Einsteinian system are the full definition of reality," he writes.

'Possible Realities'

"I hope, however, that the data contained here is of sufficient power and solidity to enable those who are open to expanding their view of possible realities to consider that the world might contain forces and intelligences of which we have hardly allowed ourselves to dream."

Fair enough. Something — even if only a form of mass-hysteria — is powering this rash of abduction claims, making it worth the kind of serious investigation Mack presents here.



Dr. John Mack came to believe some of his interviewees