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Book World (USPS 060-600) (ISSN 0006-7369) is published Sunday only for \$26 per year (\$31.20 for Canada and \$31.20 for foreign) by The Washington Post Newspaper, 1150 15th St., N.W. Washington, D. C. 20071. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D. C.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Washington Post at the address above. Local advertising representative: Gayle Pegg (202) 334-6980. New York advertising representative: Lynn Swanson, (212) 350-5050. New York advertisement agency, Sawyer-Ferguson-Walker, advertisement representative, Marcella Huston (212) 661-6262. Book World accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.



ILLUSTRATION BY GARY BASEMAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Adventures in Inner Space

ABDUCTION
Human Encounters With Aliens
By John E. Mack
Scribner's. 432 pp. \$22

By Rudy Rucker

As a science-fiction writer, I am predisposed to enjoy such things as psychotronic space-invader films, crazed saucer cults and the modern pop myth of UFOs. But with John Mack's *Abduction*, ufology has reached a vile new low.

Mack, professor of psychiatry at the Cambridge Hospital, Harvard Medical School, is the author of a psychobiography of T.E. Lawrence, *Prince of Our Disorder*. He was on the board of directors of Werner Erhard's est in the early 1980s and brings a hard-eyed huckster's zeal to his trade. His business is hypnotizing and regressing subjects—he calls them “experiencers”—in order to help them bring forth memories of UFO abductions, often decades after these supposedly took place. Business is booming for Mack and his ilk, and, with the support of Las Vegas businessman Robert Bigelow, more and more “mental health professionals” are being trained to hypnotize troubled individuals who come to believe that they have been abducted by flying saucers.

What are the abduction fantasies like? Much of a dreary muchness. You're in bed or in a car. You see a light. You float up into the air and into a flying saucer. Inside the saucer a tall alien who reminds you of a doctor probes at your genitals and sticks things up your anus. If you are a man, the “doctor” masturbates you to orgasm, and if you are a woman, the “doctor” extracts eggs from your ovaries. Then the aliens give you a millenarian spiel about how it's high time the human race got its act together, and you wake up back in your car or in your bed. This pathetically infantile scenario was first popularized by Whitley Strieber's bestseller *Communion*. But come on! Is this really what superhuman aliens would do?

In *Abduction*, the emphasis on sex, or what Mack calls “urological-gynecological procedures,” is icky and pervasive. Mack repeatedly stresses that the “sperm samples are forcibly taken” from the men. He never seems to entertain the notion that these men may have some sexual guilt over nocturnal emissions coupled with garden-variety masochistic sexual fantasies. And it is interesting to notice that at least one of his female subjects has bad memories of having undergone an abortion.

If the case studies which Mack describes weren't so pitiful, this could all be quite funny. “Ed,” for instance, tells Mack how a saucer woman taught him the secrets of the universe after having masturbated him. In Ed's words, “she explained things in scientific, logical terms

Rudy Rucker's science-fiction novels include two that were recently reissued under the title “Live Robots.” His latest novel, “The Hacker and the Ants,” is forthcoming.

... da, da, da that these are the laws of the universe, da da da da da, and you know.” Mack wonderingly observes that later “Ed found that he had an instinctive appreciation . . . of such matters as Einsteinian relativity, micro- and macrorealities, the curvature of space, and the paradoxes in scientific laws.” Da da da da da!

But *Abduction* is not really funny. It goes without saying that the book is written with the complete lack of humor characteristic of the true believer. And what makes the book very actively unfunny is the feeling that Mack's procedures may be really damaging to some of his subjects.

The chapter called “Alienation of Affections” is particularly disturbing. Here we have an account of “Jerry,” a high-school dropout housewife with three children. “All three of Jerry's children appear to be involved in the abduction phenomenon.” The children cry and scream when they see Bert and Ernie on TV, when they see commercials with UFOs, and when they dream of “scary owls with eyes.” So what is Mack doing for this tormented family? Courageously convincing them that their worst dreams are really true. As he staunchly puts it, “On several occasions I have seen a look of distress, even tears, on the face of an abductee at the moment when he or she realizes that an experience they had chosen, more comfortably, to consider a dream had occurred in some sort of fully ‘awake’ . . . or conscious state . . .”

IT'S LIKE a child saying, “I had a nightmare about a monster.” And the parent answering, “Yes, dear, so did I. And . . . honey . . . it's not a dream. It's really true.”

This is irresponsible, dangerous claptrap. Some thrill-seekers will of course enjoy their abduction-regression sessions with Mack. They pay him for weird new memories and he delivers. As he delicately puts it, “I cannot avoid the fact that a co-creative intuitive process such as this may yield information that is in some sense the product of the intermingling or flowing together of the consciousness of the two (or more) people in the room.” But what about those who get in deeper than they expected with Mack's “therapy”? And what about their families?

Perhaps to forestall this kind of criticism, Mack stresses that he attempts to lead his subjects towards the “transformational and spiritual growth aspects of the abduction phenomenon.” In practice, this means that he attempts to get his subjects to undergo a kind of “ego death” and “experience themselves as returning to their cosmic source or ‘Home,’ an inexpressibly beautiful realm beyond . . . space/time as we know it.” Well, groovy, man, but like why can't we just drop acid?

Why is it, finally, that I find *Abduction* so annoying? I guess it's because I love the idea of UFOs, and *Abduction* drags this idea into the mud. UFOs should be a witty and inspiring notion, but in the hands of John Mack, UFOs become boring and above all humorless. ■