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'Abduction' by UFO fizzles

By Michael Grunwald
GLOBE STAFF

EASTON - The chairman of the foreign language department greeted students in Klingon. An assistant dean scanned the heavens through a telescope. The theme from "The Empire Strikes Back" blared across the Stonehill College quadrangle.

And physics professor Chet Raymo was ready, sifting through the contents of his overnight bag (beer, Reese's Pieces, sperm sample, change of underwear) as more than 200 Stonehill students waited for space aliens to abduct him at midnight Monday.

Tragically, the aliens never showed, ignoring the challenge Raymo issued in a recent Globe column on the newfound celebrity of John Mack, the Pulitzer prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist whose latest book, "Abductions," attempts to document the existence of extraterrestrial life.

A group of students wearing aluminum foil did wheel Raymo away in a recycling bin, providing an appropriately odd conclusion to the weirdest event on the Stonehill quad since Bianca Jagger received an honorary degree there in 1983.

But for the study-breaking spectators, many of whom had watched Mack on "Oprah!" that day, the otherworldly snub was a bit disappointing.

"I guess this means the final won't be canceled," said Kristy Batchelder, 20, a junior enrolled in Raymo's popular class on The Universe.

For Raymo, who showed up for his close encounter wearing a propeller cap, the UFO no-show was a vindication of sorts. In his April 11 column, he offered to make his body available to the alien scientists Mack described in "Abductions," provided they were willing to pick him up Monday at midnight. "I doubt if anyone will show up to spirit me away - but I'm prepared to be astonished," he wrote.

Even without the guests of honor, the scene Monday night was astonishing. John Golden, chairman of the foreign language department, kept shooting people with a phaser gun. Gregory Shaw, a professor of religious studies, distributed literature revealing that Raymo himself was an undercover alien. ("What a perfect cover Raymo has established, teaching science in this sleepy New England town!")

Julie Spillane, a 21-year-old junior, showed up wearing antennae fashioned out of a hairband, toilet paper, and glitter, and confessed that she was originally from the planet Zeptor.

"It's one of those family secrets," said Spillane. "Sort of an if-I-tell-you-I-have-to-kill-you kind of thing."

As midnight approached, Raymo chatted amiably with students, warning them not to get too close to the incoming spaceship. But the only intruders to arrive were 20-year-old engineering major Michael Paul of Worcester and his five fellow Tin Man knockoffs, who noisily



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Julie Spillane (left), who says she is originally from planet Zeptor, and Molly McHugh wait - in vain - for space aliens to abduct Stonehill professor Chet Raymo.

hailed Raymo back to their dorm.

"Ah, well," said Raymo, who shared his Reese's Pieces with his captors. "Maybe next time."

Richard Grant, the assistant dean of academic services at Stonehill, was responsible for much of the pre-abduction publicity on campus. He admitted he was surprised that Raymo's

invitation had gone unheeded, but insisted that Mack's theories, detailed this week in Time Magazine, could still be valid.

"Gods don't respond to human challenges, and neither do aliens," he said. "The issue is still open. Definitely open."

The aliens could not be reached for comment.