

TODAY



In April, Scribners published psychiatrist John Mack's 'Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens,' featuring 13 in-depth case histories drawn from his research

By LYNN VAN MATRE

Chicago Tribune

Five years ago, when a colleague asked Harvard psychiatrist John E. Mack if he wanted to meet Budd Hopkins, Mack replied, "Who's he?" Told that Hopkins was a New York artist known for his work with people who claimed to have been abducted by aliens and hustled aboard UFOs, Mack swiftly came to a professional conclusion.

"I assumed that either there must be something the matter with Budd Hopkins or that Hopkins was encountering a new form of mental illness," Mack recalls. "I wasn't prepared for what I found."

What Mack found when he finally met Hopkins was something so personally compelling that the veteran psychiatrist plunged into the field of abduction research himself. Over the next three years, as word of his interest in the abduction phenomenon spread, nearly 100 self-proclaimed abductees (or "experiencers") would contact Mack at his office at Harvard University's Cambridge Hospital.

The stories varied, but many abductees told of being taken from their homes by big-eyed extraterrestrials and borne aboard space ships; there, sperm or ova samples were extracted from their bodies as part of an ongoing earthling-alien hybrid breeding program.

After taking what he describes as thorough psychiatric histories of the subjects, Mack concluded that they were "solid people, of sound mind" and told several colleagues that he believed "something important" was going on.

It wasn't the first time the psychiatrist had flirted with what some might consider fringe fields or taken an alternative approach. The Center for Psychology and

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alien ideas

Harvard's controversial
John Mack tackles
phenomena of UFO
encounters

UFO beings show science-fiction roots

By CHAUNCEY MABE

Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel

UFO researchers such as John E. Mack, Budd Hopkins, Dr. David Jacobs, and Thomas Bullard claim that nothing about the experiences of abductees resembles science fiction or other cultural influences. Believers cite this supposed uniqueness, along with the consistency of detail among abductees' stories, as proving the reality of abductions.

Aerospace historian Curtis Peebles, however, argues that everything about UFO aliens is drawn from science fiction. Peebles relies on the work of another UFO debunker, Martin Kottmeyer, for his examples. In the end notes of his book "Watch the Skies!," for example, he reports that an episode of the "Buck Rogers in the 25th Century" comic strip in 1930 features a kidnapping with a pattern identical to modern-day abductions.

The victim is captured by a giant claw (just like one of Hopkins' case histories), taken into a spherical spacecraft, examined on a table while in an "electro-hypnotic" trance. She talks with aliens, is offered a view of the Earth from space, and finally is returned to the surface of the planet.

Perhaps the most telling evidence of science fiction influence is that of the children allegedly produced by the crossbreeding experiments. Abductees describe these human-alien offspring as cold and emotionless. Sound familiar?

It should. Writes Peebles, "It is just such a being which is the most famous character in all of science fiction — Mr. Spock of 'Star Trek.' How logical."

UFO

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Social Change, the nonprofit research organization Mack founded in 1983, often funds projects that combine psychology with ecological or ethnic issues outside the psychiatric mainstream.

"He's never been afraid to take a stand or follow his intuition, even if it might subject him to criticism," says Douglas Jacobs, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard who has known and admired Mack professionally since 1975. "His whole career has been about blazing trails."

But for many of Mack's fellow psychiatrists, the abducted-by-alien study was just too bizarre. Dismissing abductees' claims as preposterous, colleagues respectfully cautioned him about pursuing the project.

"The difference between courage and foolhardiness is often subtle," Mack admits. "After a while, though, I reached the point where there seemed to be more to lose in terms of my own sense of integrity by keeping my mouth shut than I could lose by describing what I was finding."

In April, Scribners published Mack's "Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens," featuring 13 in-depth case histories drawn from his research. And now a lot of people assume there must be something the matter with John Mack — or at least something seriously awry with the 64-year-old professor's professional judgment when it comes to alien activities.

"There are people who think he's an embarrassment to Harvard, that he's gone off the deep end," Jacobs acknowledges. "Many of my colleagues have rejected John Mack's research outright."

George Vaillant, a Harvard Medical School psychiatry professor who has known Mack for 25 years, provided a book jacket blurb for "Abduction" comparing it favorably to Frazer's "The Golden Bough." But he refuses to discuss his personal views on the validity of Mack's research or the professional risks Mack is taking.

But whatever his colleagues may think, Mack's credentials — in addition to being a Harvard psychiatry professor, he is the author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of T.E. Lawrence — set him apart from the pack and lend a stamp of respectability to a topic generally relegated to tabloids. As a result, he has received mainstream news media coverage seldom accorded to just anybody who announces his belief in alien abductions, though Mack isn't crazy about invariance being described as a believer. He's even less crazy about an anonymous quote from a "friend" in a New York Times Magazine article that suggested Mack's UFO abduction "obsession" led to his recent separation from his wife after 34 years of marriage.

"Untrue, and a cheap shot," says Mack, in Chicago recently on a book promotion tour. "Our separation has nothing to do with this."

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