

# True believer takes on UFO skeptics

*Has science closed its eyes to possibilities or are some things just out of this world?*

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TUKWILA — John Mack is a Harvard psychiatrist, the founding director of a renowned psychiatry department at Massachusetts' Cambridge Hospital and a Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of Lawrence of Arabia.

He also believes about 90 of his patients have been abducted and molested by space aliens and has written a new book on that subject called "Abductions: Human Encounters With Aliens."

Last night Mack gamely addressed an overflow audience in Tukwila at the national convention of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, a skeptics' group that made a heated discussion hotter by confronting Mack with a woman journalist who had hoaxed him with an abduction story he swallowed.

The timing was apt: Today is the 47th anniversary of the first modern reported sighting of flying saucers,

made by a pilot near Mount Rainier.

The debate posed an intriguing question: Are skeptics justified in demanding physical proof and conformance with physical laws, or is the scientific community closing its mind to compelling evidence of what Mack called "something not of this world but which enters into this world"?

The Tukwila convention is addressing not just the alien-abduction issue but human belief in repressed memories of past abuse, angels, conspiracy theories and questionable "expert" courtroom testimony.

One of Mack's allies was Sharon Filip, a Seattle hypnotherapist who described her encounter with a UFO. She asked the crowd how many believed in God. No hands went up.

Mack said his patients' stories were so compelling he is convinced there are realities and realms beyond scientific laws and human senses.

"We are the condemned prisoners of rationalism," he quoted.

But Donna Bassett, a North Carolina free-lance journalist who posed



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*John Mack, a psychiatry professor at Harvard, discusses the possibility of alien abductions.*

as an abductee, said Mack is simply gullible.

"I've never seen a UFO, nor have I ever been abducted," she said. "I faked it. . . . The (research) environment was disturbing. There was no scientific method whatsoever."

Among the arguments:

• **Delusion.** University of Kentucky psychologist Robert Baker said abduction stories fit a common "hypnagogic" sleep condition that will affect 4 to 5 percent of Americans in their lifetime — or more than 10 million people — who will wake to a vivid hallucination that a ghost, demon or alien is in their room. Similar visions have been recounted since the Middle Ages, he said.

Thomas Bullard, a folklorist at Indiana University, countered with a survey he did suggesting 80 percent of abductees reported a similar appearance for the aliens.

"Surprisingly, there is a great deal of consistency," he argued. "What we have here is an anomaly. I don't know what it is. It's worth investigating."

• **Motive.** William Cone, a Newport Beach, Calif., psychiatrist who has treated alleged abductees, said that based on his experience, "Many of these people are in it for the money," and others are troubled and seeking an identity that abduction stories give them. "Some of these people are just certifiably nuts," he added. "Not all of them."

Mack said his patients were often reluctant to share their experience

and include a businessman running for Congress, two children under age 3 and a paraplegic with scars from a claimed spaceship medical examination that the paralyzed man could not have made himself.

• **Evidence.** Baker pointed out no abductee has returned with a surgical implant, spaceship souvenir, photograph or other artifact that has withstood scientific scrutiny. No hybrid children have turned up as proof of alleged alien-breeding programs. Members of the audience argued abductions are primarily an American cultural phenomenon, with few reports in most other countries.

Mack said the stories are so frequent, convincing and similar that there must be something to them. "All other cultures allow other beings, other realities, other dimensions," he maintained.

One UFO enthusiast who came to the skeptics' gathering was DeAnna Emerson of La Conner, Skagit County, who brought a photograph of what she said was a UFO over Skagit Bay taken in 1988. "It's always a good idea to hear both sides out," she explained. "I keep balanced."