

ALEX BEAM

The search for intelligent life at Harvard

E. T., PHONE HARVARD. Your friend Dr. Mack is in trouble. Dr. John Mack is surely one of the more curious apparitions in the Harvard pantheon. A Pulitzer

Prize winner (for a biography of T. E. Lawrence) and a tenured professor of psychiatry at the World's Greatest University, he also happens to be the World's Best Credentialed Champion of UFO abduction tales. He has written a best-selling book, "Abduction," and has co-conjured many a tabloid TV tall tale. Mack first achieved national renown when he cosponsored a five-day conference on "true" UFO abduction tales at MIT three years ago.

Since then, Mack, who divides his time among Harvard Medical School, Cambridge Hospital and his Cambridge-based Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER), has cobbled together an industrial-strength UFO-logy promotion machine. Here, for instance, is the taped message that greets callers to PEER: "If you feel you may have had extraordinary experiences and

would like to learn about our program, dial 16. If you are calling to request that Dr. Mack, a PEER staff member or an experienter be a speaker at a conference, please dial 13."

It seemed inevitable that Mack's antics would run afoul of WGU's power elite; now they have. Dean Daniel Tosteson of the medical school has appointed a special faculty committee, chaired by professor emeritus (and former New England Journal of Medicine editor) Arnold Relman, and including members from the

**DR. JOHN MACK**

Harvard counsel's office, two med-school docs and an associate dean, to investigate Mack. The committee has already drafted a preliminary report that criticizes Mack's research, and finds him "in violation of the standards of conduct expected of a member of the faculty of Harvard University."

One of Mack's colleagues says the committee was formed in the wake of allegations made by former "experienter" Donna Bassett, who last year publicly accused Mack of procedural and financial improprieties in his research. This colleague adds that the inquiry also has a broader agenda: "When a nationally known Harvard professor says people have been abducted by aliens, the Harvard establishment is going to react."

The stakes are high. Friends say that Mack initially accepted the medical school's

assurances that the inquiry was collegial in nature. He appeared alone before the group and willingly turned over tapes of his interviews with purported UFO abductees. More recently, however, Mack has appealed to two lawyers – Eric MacLeish and Daniel Sheehan – for help during the investigation. Mack, MacLeish and Sheehan all decline comment.

However, in a letter to one of Mack's supporters, Sheehan points out that Harvard may refer the committee report to the state medical licensing board, of which Dr. Relman is a newly appointed member. Worse still, he writes, the "Report . . . could also be used by Dean Tosteson as a formal faculty complaint calling for the removal of John from the Harvard University faculty and for the dissolution of his tenure."

BEAM, Page 89

UFO abduction tales cause big Mack attack

■ BEAM

Continued from Page 85

One of the few major-league academics publicly defending Mack is David Pritchard, a physics professor and UFO abduction researcher at MIT.

"It seems to me an infringement of the doctrine of freedom of inquiry that John is subject to an investigation that, as far as I can tell, has not been initiated by the faculty and

does not have clear rules of procedure or rules for the dissemination of the report the committee writes," Pritchard says. A spokeswoman for the medical school refuses to comment on the investigation.

The secret investigation would have remained secret had not Mack – who may be brilliant, but does not seem smart – availed himself of legal aid offered by Sheehan, counsel to the Christic Institute.

California-based Christic is a far-left, celebrity-fueled (Bruce Springsteen, Carl Sagan, Ted Danson) conspiracy boutique that has inserted itself into various news events, with equivocal results.

Sheehan represented Christic in a \$24 million lawsuit – dismissed by a federal judge – that alleged that key figures in the Iran-contra mess were involved in terrorism and cocaine trafficking.

More recently, Christic sued unsuccessfully to block the launch of

NASA's Galileo mission to Jupiter, which carried plutonium on board.

When and how the Mack inquiry will end remains to be seen.

"It's the most interesting story I've ever been part of," says one of the many participants. "I hope the whole story eventually comes to light."

► Alex Beam's Internet address is beam@globe.com.