

Harvard heretic gives space aliens earth cred

TOM RUFFLES

ELIZABETH HIBBS was reading in bed at her home in Kentucky when she suddenly found herself being beamed up into a spaceship. Surrounded by alien beings known in extraterrestrial circles as Little Greys, she was asked telepathically if she would like to donate some blood.

When she replied that she was afraid of needles, the aliens, each about 5ft tall with pointed heads, large almond eyes and a polite, clinical manner, returned her to her bed and her book.

Hibbs found it difficult, even in America, to find anyone to listen and not laugh. Then along came John Mack, a Pulitzer prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist and founder of the Center for Psychology and Social Change at the Harvard Medical School.

He has made the aliens and their sexual habits the subject of an earnest and sympathetic investigation in a bestselling volume that has caused a sensation in American academe. The book is at the centre of a bizarre and bitter row that has divided the hallowed institution of Harvard, which some accuse Mack of bringing into disrepute by dignifying the absurd with academic research.

It was in 1990 that Mack first came into contact with people who claimed they had been abducted. The tales they had to tell were extraordinary. There was Dave, a Pennsylvania

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healthcare worker, who was levitated into a spaceship, had a long probe inserted in his anus and was forced to donate sperm to the aliens. Other males provided identical accounts and females described having their eggs removed.

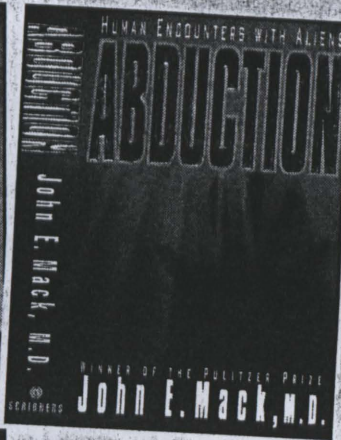
"These people suffered from no psychiatric disorder and were reporting with powerful emotion what to them were utterly real experiences," Mack wrote.

"I was dealing with a phenomenon that I felt could not be explained psychiatrically, yet was simply not possible within the framework of the western scientific world view."

Mack discovered that those abducted by aliens believe that there is a parallel world of people with a different agenda from humans.

As well as the Little Greys, who are alien "scientists", there are the Pleiadiens, who look exactly like humans (Terrins), except they have silver eyes.

"The Little Greys are basically scientists and their mission is research," explained Hibbs, a retired journalist, whose experiences led her to establish the Society for Universal Thought, a support group for those who have had contact with aliens.



Bestselling academic: Mack and his controversial book

Mack found such accounts compelling and became sufficiently convinced of their veracity to engage in protracted research. The result was *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, which became a bestseller. Apart from making Mack rich, he has become an icon to the growing "I was abducted by a space alien" community, and has made regular appearances on television chat shows.

Harvard was astounded that one of its respected professors could take such a bizarre sub-

ject so seriously. Perhaps, too, some were jealous of the fame and riches his research earned him. Daniel Tosteson, dean of the Harvard Medical School, set up a committee to investigate whether Mack had conducted his investigation to Harvard's exacting scholarly standards and whether he was exploiting his subjects and exposing them to harm.

The committee conducted more than 30 interviews, including several with Mack. Its draft report acknowledged Mack's right to investigate any-

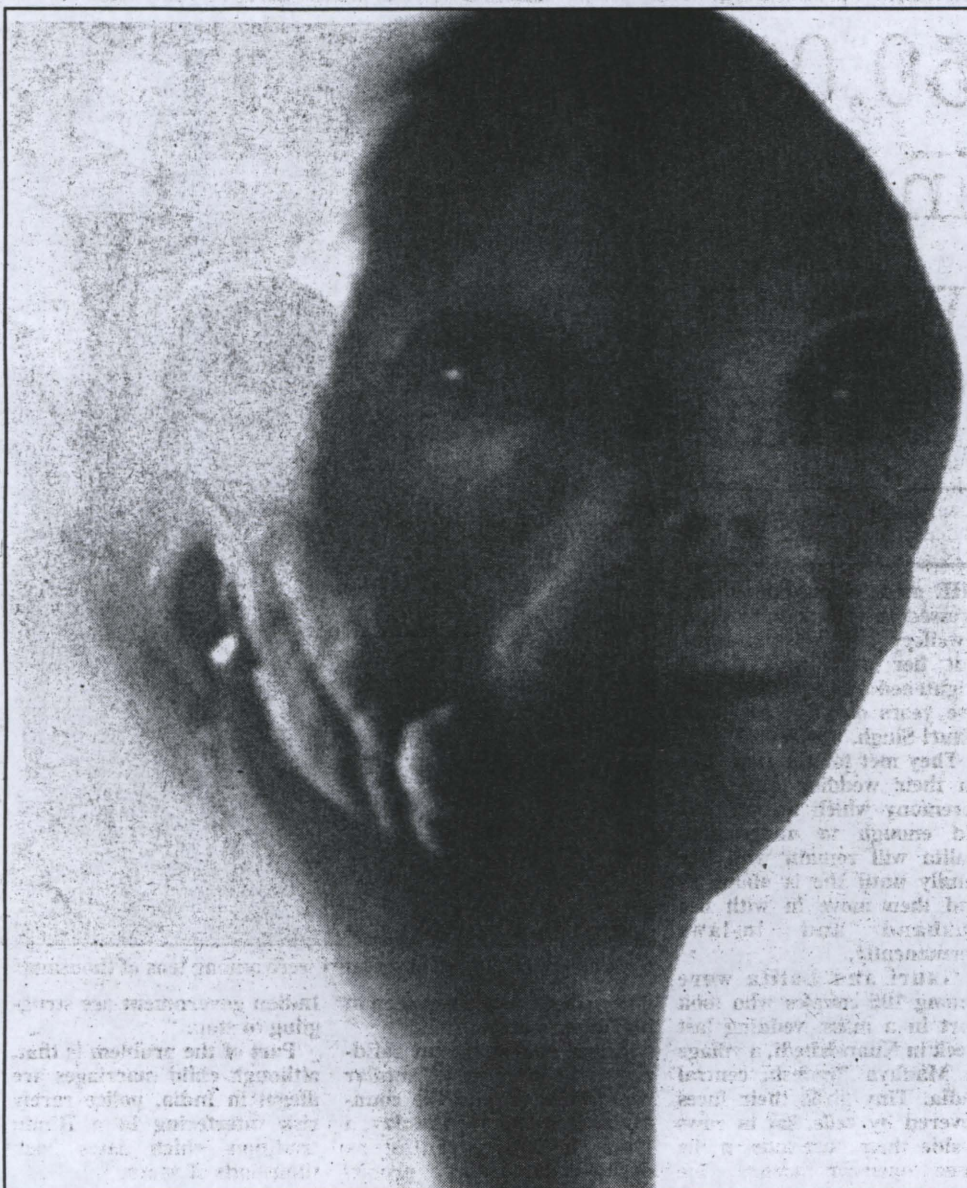
thing he wanted but attacked his methods. The report said Mack should have tried to get his work published in an academic journal after it had been reviewed by his peers. Mack says his work was reviewed but no responsible journal would publish his findings.

The dean has to decide what to do about Mack: his options range from ending Mack's tenure at Harvard to praising his courage for investigating such a controversial subject. Mack's colleagues want blood and the dean will have to take action. That is one reason why the professor has hired two lawyers to defend his reputation.

"This case will define the parameters for discussion of ideas at universities," said Roderick MacLeish, one of Mack's lawyers. "If John Mack can be suppressed, what's next? There's no empirical proof that God exists, so why should all the professors in the theology department be able to talk about God?"

Whatever the dean's decision, Mack has provided thousands of Americans who believe in aliens with the one thing they have been searching for: credibility.

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Close encounters of the brainy kind: how Hollywood portrayed the extraterrestrials

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