

# Harvard's Mack: The Subject Is Aliens

By DAN MACKIE  
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"There is no middle ground," contends Martin P. Hussey, a postmaster in South Pomfret who toils in a pantry-sized office selling stamps and weighing packages, steady work with few surprises and heaps of paperwork. After hours, he has developed an intriguing sideline: He is promoter of a world-class voyage into the paranormal.

This weekend Hussey brings to Dartmouth College Dr. John Mack, Harvard psychiatrist and sometime visitor to Thetford, whose work has become focused on strange and lurid tales of people who believe they've been abducted by aliens and forced into close encounters of a sexual kind. Mack believes they are sincere, and not crazy at all.

Says Hussey: "Either you think it is a crock, or you say, 'I've got to hear more about it.'"

The abduction stories are far removed from the movie star E.T., the friendly extraterrestrial. These humanoids, said to be short, with large heads and dark eyes, allegedly forced men and women to have sex or take part in weird science experiments, then beamed them home, often with disturbing messages about our planet's future. Mack's work has subjected him to the derision of skeptics and possible censure from colleagues. It has also led to a best-selling book, *Abduction*, an appearance on *Oprah*, and probably life tenure on the paranormal circuit.

"I have committed a kind of crime, a violation of a certain kind of reality," Mack confessed recently.

Appearing with Mack is Colin Andrews, whom Hussey calls the world's leading authority on crop circles, which are strange patterns found in fields, most commonly in England. Some believe they were been left by interplanetary beings of high intelligence. Others suspect they've been chiseled by beer-swilling hoaxers.

The event is being put on by Martin P. Hussey Productions, a just-formed enterprise, in cooperation with the American Society of Dowsers and the Lightgate Learning Center of Thetford, a New Age learning center. The \$30 price tag is steep, Hussey admits, but he said speakers like Mack and Andrews command large fees, adding that they need it to support their work. Hussey expects to make a "small profit" from tomorrow's six-hour conference at Dartmouth, which has rented out Cook Auditorium at the Murdough Center and is "totally" uninterested in its content, according to Hussey. But he said he hopes some members of the Dartmouth community will participate.

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We earthlings live in a world of science and a world of wonder. The gap between those two worlds is evident in the passionate assertions of a man like Mack.

Mack, 65, has been in the center of a scientific and academic controversy since he took up the cause of the UFO abductees, also known as "experiencers."

His work has received generous subsidies from Laurance Rockefeller, patriarch of Woodstock, who reportedly donates a quarter million dollars a year to Mack's Center for Psychology and Social Change. A spokesman for Rockefeller said his policy is not to comment publicly on Mack's projects.

Mack garnered honors for his past work, notably a Pulitzer Prize-winning 1977 biography of T.E. Lawrence, titled *A Prince of Our Disorder*. He is credited with building an exemplary psychiatry department at Cambridge Hospital. He is said to be an intense person, energetic and charismatic, with an aloof sureness about him.

But his other interests have challenged convention. Mack has been on the board of directors of est, a controversial consciousness-altering program, and trained for several years in something called holotropic breathwork, a technique of rapid breathing that allegedly produces altered states. Mack has been quoted as saying that one session outdid the results of years of analysis. He re-experienced his mother's death, which occurred when he was 8 months old, and also felt his father's grief at the time. *Esquire* reported that Mack had a past-life experience in which he was a 16th-century Russian who had to watch while a band of Mongols decapitated his 4-year-old son. "It was awful," said Mack.

Those unconventional paths have raised far less controversy than Mack's recent interest. In 1989, he met Budd Hopkins, a New York artist who had published a book, *Intruders*, about UFO abductions. Mack was taken with Hopkins' accounts, and "the internal consistency of the highly detailed accounts (of abductions) by different individuals who

would have had no way to communicate with one another," he told *Psychology Today*.

They gave him "specific, consistent information" about the inside of spaceships, procedures, medical instruments and more. Mack also cited "interesting but inconclusive physical 'evidence' of abduction — strange scoop marks, nodules and cuts (in one case, on a quadriplegic man who would have been unable to self-inflict them); and the fairly common experience of waking upside down in the bed or sometimes outside the house, with clothes removed or lost."

Mack started working with clients, more than 100 to date, who suspected they'd been abducted. He used the breathworks technique and hypnosis to elicit detailed stories of the alleged events. Some people thought that strange devices had been stuck inside their bodies, or that semen or other samples were taken. Peter Faust of Watertown, Mass., believes he was a participant in an extraterrestrial breeding program perhaps aiming to create a race of hybrid humans.

Mack has said that he can find no evidence of mental illness to explain the similarities of the stories. He says that his clients were not eager to become New Age celebrities. Most are traumatized by the

resurrected memories at first, he says, but then work through the pain to develop a new sense of their relationship with the aliens. Some believe they have been given messages about coming ecological or nuclear disasters prompted by human desecration of Planet Earth.

In a telephone interview, Mack said the most powerful evidence that the abduction phenomenon is real is "the consistency of the reports from people who didn't know each other. The details were so similar — only real experience operates like that."

Mack responds to his critics in depth in his upcoming paperback of *Abduction* (with Andrews, he will sign copies from 2 to 4 p.m. today at the Dartmouth Bookstore) but offered this assertion about his research: "The methodology is scrupulous, I believe." He said he is trying to "map a new territory" and has attempted to go into as much detail as possible in the stories of abductees, and has tried to rule out other explanations. Testing has failed to show any psychological pathology, he said.

He says he asks people simply "to be open to the data. Most human cultures through history have been open to visitations from other realms." Press coverage of his work, he says, has ranged from thoughtful to sneering. "I think this phenomenon is threatening to our view of the world."

Mack says he is more convinced now that the abduction phenomenon is real. Thousands of cases have now been reported, he said. "There isn't one that has been found out to be something else."

Mack has said that the reality of the alien visits may be something far removed from our view of possibilities. They may be able to exist in different dimensions, he has suggested. "Something exciting is happening that deserves further study."

On a more local and down-to-earth note, Mack says he is looking forward to appearing in this area because of his family's ties to Thetford, where they have had a summer home for many years.

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The controversy about Mack swirls around his technique. Critics say he has departed from the rigors of science. Some contend that therapists can use hypnosis to guide, even unwittingly, the imagination of patients to concoct memories of ritual abuse by Satanists, sex abuse, past lives or alien abductions.

Philip Klass, a professional skeptic who publishes a newsletter, harshly dismisses Mack's clients as "little nobodies" who are just seeking attention.

One woman, Donna Bassett, posed as an abductee to gain entrance in Mack's research program and learn about his methods. She says she faked her stories, and concluded that while Mack was sincere, his procedures were flawed and he used little scientific methodology. Abductees told Mack "what he wanted to hear," she said. Mack now says that he isn't sure that Bassett really was a poser. He says that some of the other abductees suspect that she just couldn't deal with the memories that were bubbling up.

David Smith, psychology professor at Middlebury College in Vermont, looks at Mack's work in a course that looks at pseudo-science and the paranormal. He thinks Mack's research is flawed, though he says the subject

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— ALIENS



AP  
Tomorrow at Dartmouth, Dr. John Mack will talk about encounters between aliens and humans.

# Aliens

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is fun to think about.

He says Mack has failed to fully explore other possibilities that could explain the abduction memories. Some researchers think they come from temporary sleep paralysis, a condition associated with vivid hallucinations. It's been pointed out that the alien sex stories are evocative of the belief of some people in the middle ages that they were put into trances and seduced by fairies and spirits.

Others are calling for more rigorous psychological testing of Mack's clients, and reviews by independent psychiatrists. "I think we have to approach this with a skeptical and critical approach," says Middlebury's Smith.

Mack has also had to endure the scorn of people who think his work is so much lunacy, yet another chapter in human gullibility that has included fads like pyramid power, mind control or numerology. Writing in *The Nation*, Anne Bernays, a teacher at Holy Cross College, lumps alien abduction with witchcraft and alchemy, calling them "wacko responses to the normal anxieties of everyday

life."

And then, of course, there is ridicule. Headline writers snicker with titles like "Professor Mack, Phone Home" on stories. Some consider him a New Age version of Timothy Leary, a Harvard professor who turned on and dropped out during the drug-crazed '60s. MIT students, who produce a mock *Annals of Improbable Research*, awarded Mack the "Ig Nobel" prize for his research. They invited him to be speak at their annual dinner. Mack didn't show, and the emcee cracked, "We're not upset, frankly, we're concerned."

More serious trouble for Mack: A Harvard Medical School committee has been examining his work to see if he has been doing his research in accordance with Harvard's standards of scholarly investigation. Sources told *The New York Times* that the committee will issue a report sharply critical of Mack, although his tenure is not in jeopardy.

Mack's lawyer has countered that the real issue is academic freedom, that a professor should be able to pursue any field he or she wishes. Some suspect that Harvard is just concerned about potential embarrass-

ment. Alex Beam of *The Boston Globe* recently wrote that "the morning line is that Harvard will back off. No aggrieved patient or financial donor — according to Mack, there are none — has appeared before the committee, which has listened exclusively to caviling from several of Mack's colleagues."

In an interview with the *Valley News*, Mack said he couldn't publicly discuss the committee's procedures.

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Martin Hussey, who is also treasurer of the Vermont dowers club, finds the explorations of people like Mack and Andrews "fascinating."

He doesn't maintain that they have proved their cases about aliens among us, but thinks no one else has given an acceptable alternative explanation. "To blow Mack away by saying that Mack is a kook, I think that's burying your head in the sand," he says.

Hussey says that many people become upset and angered by the notion that there are legitimate mysteries, that there is a realm of the unexplained. "I enjoy the uncomfortable feeling," he says on the other hand. "It makes me wonder."