

FASHION



Sir Hardy Amies:  
50 years  
in Savile  
Row /15

TRAVEL



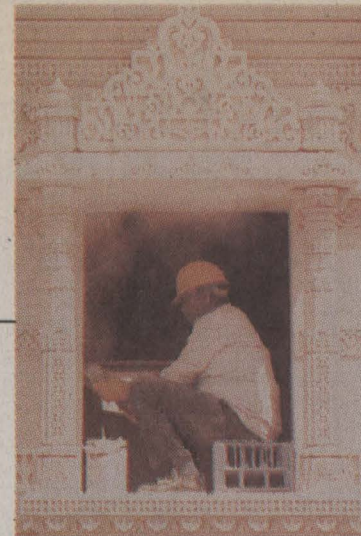
Tibet: the  
final frontier,  
by Sir Fitzroy  
Maclean /12-13

MATTERS



The great  
British art  
of letting  
yourself go /14

ARTS

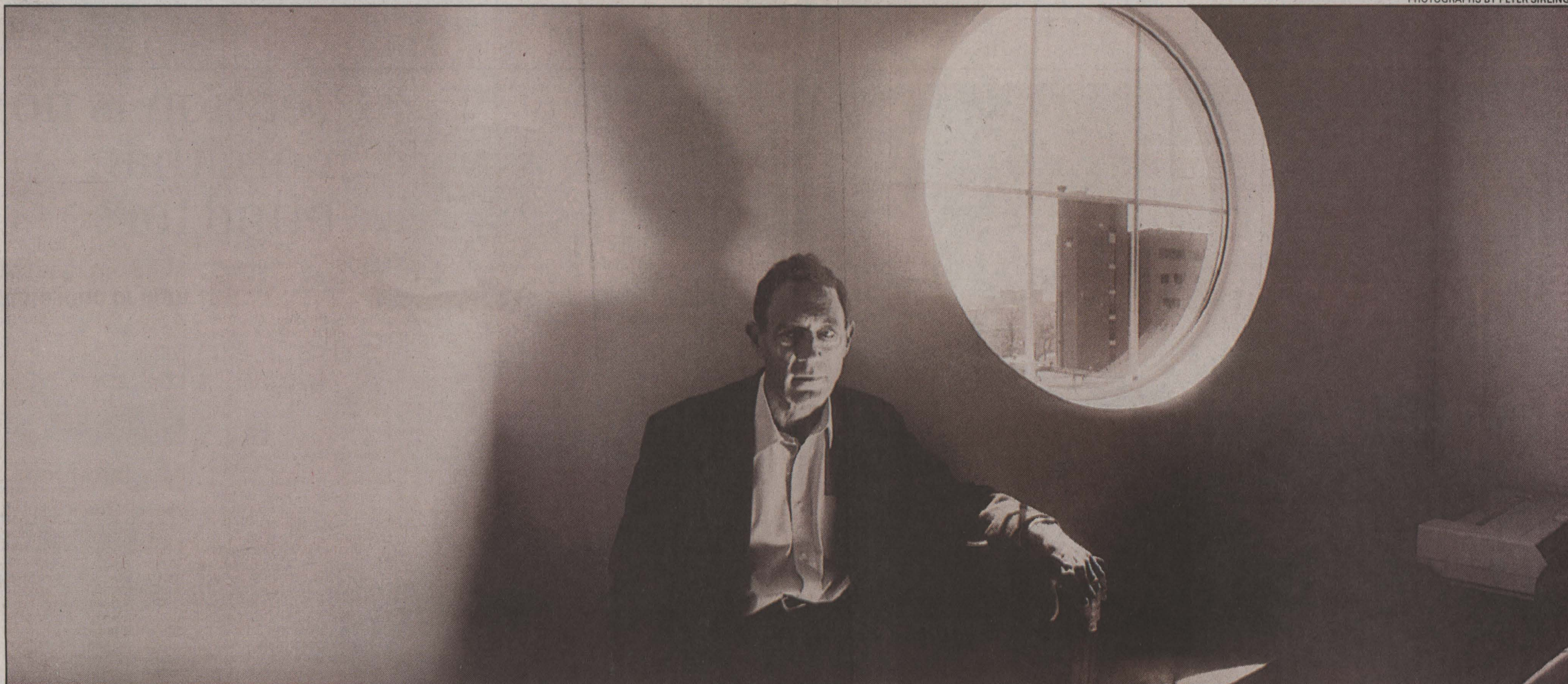


Neasden's  
answer  
to the Taj  
Mahal /6

The Sunday Telegraph

# REVIEW

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER SIRLING



'He is a brilliant man who is easily persuaded of things, but this time he has lost it'... Or has he? Dr John Mack's best-selling *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens* is based on five years' study of more than 100 victims

# Professor Mack and

# the little green men

**T**HE SIMPLE furnishings in Dr John Mack's office on the third floor of the Harvard University Medical School include a gallon-sized tub of peanut butter, a portable tape-recorder and a low couch on which, not long ago, a woman lay panting, whimpering and barely able to form the words that Mack would later publish for the benefit of a resoundingly sceptical world. "They are not like us," said the woman. "They are in control. I have to surrender to them."

As a psychiatrist of international repute, Mack had already established to his own satisfaction that "Sheila" was not insane. He was equally certain that she had suffered some form of extreme trauma. On the couch, in the little room, overlooking the flowering elms and flagged footpaths of Harvard's 18th-century campus, the woman eventually related a long, detailed story of being abducted by space aliens. In retrospect, the most remarkable aspect of it was Mack's inclination to believe her.

In the next few weeks Harvard must decide what to do about John Mack. To the acute embarrassment of America's foremost university, the 64-year-old Pulitzer Prize-winning academic has emerged as the godhead of an entire global underground of UFO believers. His hugely successful book of case studies: *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens* has turned intergalactic body-snatching into a fashionable topic for discussion, Mack into a celebrity, and most of Harvard against him.

Diplomatically summarising the mood on campus, Mack's head of department, Dr Malkah Notman, says: "People have great respect for John's other achievements. But the perception is that this is not a productive area of research." A

**Victims recall being 'floated' on some kind of light beam to the alien craft. Under hypnosis they relive the panic of seeing their homes or vehicles slowly vanishing**

committee of inquiry, formed to investigate his activities, is about to deliver its verdict. Already a strong whiff of burning martyr is drifting around the campus.

As it has grown in scope and profile, Mack's "alternative" work has become the virtual gospel of those who claim to know that we are not alone. They flock to him from all over the world, these "experiencers" — as they are known in UFO jargon — whose accounts of being kidnapped by extraterrestrials have, for decades, been met with either hoots of derision or the offer of a stronger prescription. On the strength of Mack's reputation, their stories have lately been catapulted from the lurid pages of America's supermarket tabloids into the meaty main fare of *Psychology Today* and the *American Journal of Medicine*.

On the couch, under Mack's piercing, scholarly gaze, they tell tales so bizarre and impossible that, in taking them seri-

**They didn't believe Copernicus or Darwin... and now they don't believe Harvard academic Dr John Mack. William Langley reports on the 'body-snatching' theories that could get Mack sacked**

ously, Mack seems to be chancing not so much their credibility as his own. "I worry about John," says Paul McHugh, head of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC. "He is a brilliant man who is easily persuaded of things, but this time he has lost it."

Some of Mack's subjects claim to have been abducted regularly since childhood, forced to undergo medical experiments aboard spaceships, to have visited other galaxies and spawned alien children. They tell of being floated from their beds on beams of light, of having tracking devices inserted into their bodies, and of being given apocalyptic insights into the final fate of the world. Some believe that the aliens are preparing to

take over the world, others that they are working for its salvation. All are convinced that their experiences are entirely real.

In Mack's professional opinion, very few of these people are mad. Nor are they an easily dismissible bunch of Walter Mittys and compulsive attention-seekers. The majority, he suggests, are ordinary people, with ordinary jobs and ordinary lives in whose scalded consciousness dwells a strange and terrible mystery. "It's the most exciting work I've ever done," said Mack. "I'm shocked in a way to hear myself saying this, but I've been as careful as possible to exhaust conventional explanations. None of them begins to explain this phenomenon."

Harvard's inability to share Mack's enthusiasm has turned his case into a *cause célèbre* that has riven the 360-year-old university. For months an ad hoc "Knife the Mack" movement of senior academics has been lobbying hard to have him fired. "We're all for academic freedom," said one medical school professor, "but the rest of us who work here are entitled to be protected from ridicule."

Yet ridding itself of the troublesome professor is no easy option for Harvard. Such an action would be almost unprecedented, and fraught with legal and ethical difficulties. The American Association of University Professors, which represents Mack, has quietly warned Harvard of the unpleasant consequences if he is dismissed.

Disciplinary hearings are extremely rare at America's elite universities. When they do occur, the charges almost invariably relate to such conventional acts of misconduct as plagiarism, drunkenness or sexual harassment. "The Mack case is quite different. Essentially, it is a dispute over ideas — it is about what he has written," said Jonathan Knight, the AAUP's associate secretary. "One doesn't encounter this sort of thing very often in American higher education."

So why has Harvard — the mother lode of the East Coast liberal establishment — taken such an aggressive line against Mack? The man heading the inquiry, Arnold Relman, a fellow professor and former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, last week refused to comment, but in an earlier statement the university cited an obligation to "review" Mack's methods of research for possible abuses of procedure.

In particular, it wants to examine claims that he has "planted" abduction memories on patients suffering from otherwise routine psychological disorders. One former subject gave a particularly damaging assessment of Mack's investigative techniques to *Newsweek* magazine earlier this year — alleging that he had bullied and manipulated her into accepting the probability of abduction.

Others at Harvard say simply that the university is culturally resistant to the subject and terminally embarrassed by the attention.

Since starting his research five years ago, Mack has studied the cases of more than 100 abduction victims. As he painstakingly points out, most come across as regular, neighbourhood types — such as "Jerry", a 32-year-old Massachusetts clerical worker, who believes she has been kidnapped more than 50 times since she was a toddler. Now married, with three children of

her own, Jerry says she knows when the terror is about to begin from a ringing in her ears and a strange crackling energy that straightens her hair. "I am awakened by a tap," she says. "I feel paralysed but awake. They invade you entirely. Then they float you out."

Like many "experiencers", Jerry claims the aliens have

Continued overleaf



Stuff of nightmares: an 'experiencer' amid images of the aliens that she says captured her

## REVIEW

# Twenty-five excuses for Hugh Grant

"WHY did he do it?" is the anguished reaction to the actor Hugh Grant being caught in a "lewd act" with a tacky prostitute. How could he forsake his beautiful girlfriend for what seems to many observers an ugly tart?

There could be many reasons. Because men like to take risks. Because, subconsciously, people sometimes like to get caught out in their sins and misdemeanours. Ivor Novello risked his whole career cheating with petrol coupons during the war — at that time, a despised and unpatriotic thing to do. C. E. M. Joad, a national radio personality and an intellectual authority, threw away his reputation by fare-dodging. Isobel Barnett, loved and admired as an immaculate TV panel game queen, was a shop-lifter.

Because some people do not want to be famous, and deliberately sabotage their own careers.

Because unsafe, even squalid, sex is exciting.

Because quick celebrity turns

people's heads, and makes them imagine they are living a charmed life in which luck is always with them.

Because actors live in a fantasy world anyhow.

Because men like to take revenge on the women in their lives, just for being beautiful, or charming, or successful.

Because pride comes before a fall.

Because the Old Adam lurks in everyone.

Because there is a perverse and childish satisfaction in being seen as a bad-boy, bad-girl.

Because when you have worked hard, and done what you have been told to do diligently, you suddenly just want to live by instinct.

Because you want to test the loyalty of your family and friends.

Because the sexual urge is triggered by a surge of testosterone,

and testosterone says: "I want it now." Everything in American culture endorses the "I want it now" response, which is only kept under control by a carapace of rationality and cultural conditioning.

Because being in strange places unleashes inhibitions.

Because warmer climates make people from cold countries odd.

Because self-abandon is self-forgetting.

Because prostitutes are able to make men feel that this is nothing personal when the personal has become too intense.

Because "lewd acts" with those you love and respect seem incongruous.

Because you may be afraid that you have been promoted beyond your talent, and it is better to be knocked down from a pedestal dramatically, than to slip away ignominiously.

Because you are curious, and just want to know: "How does it feel?"

Because you are still in infantile rebellion against bourgeois repression.



MARY KENNY

Because the image that has been built around you is not the real you, and the conflict between image and reality creates a dissonance that is unsustainable.

Because you subconsciously want to punish your family, friends or even nationality by bringing public shame on them.

Because you are curious, and just want to know: "How does it feel?"

Because you are still in infantile rebellion against bourgeois repression.

Because you are drawn to sexual experience across the "race barrier".

Because — just for the hell of it.

It could be any one, or any combination, of such reasons, or none of them. What is graceful about Hugh Grant's subsequent conduct is that he didn't offer any of these reasons as excuses: he apologised for his "insane" action and the hurt it caused others, and took immediate responsibility for what he had done.

I DISAGREE with Patrick Mayhew's belief that the peace process in Ireland depends upon continuing leadership from John Major. The "peace process" is now bigger than any single politician.

It is not, in origin, a "political" process — though it has been

facilitated, certainly, by wise political responses — but a grass-roots process. The people want peace. You can judge that by the increase in the number of planning applications now appearing in papers all over Ireland — a sure sign of expectations of peace and prosperity (indeed, a sure sign of growing prosperity).

Indeed, probably the biggest single contributor to the peace process was Gordon Wilson, the Enniskillen draper who died on Tuesday last and who demonstrated, by forgiving his daughter's killers after the Enniskillen bombings, a perfect Christian heart. Not only did he inspire admiration all over Ireland: his act of mercy also inspired a sense of shame that such kindly people should be the victims of this "war". That was one of the biggest agencies of change — not politicians' words.

The most important news of last week, for Northern Ireland, was the announcement that Sainsbury's — and probably Tesco — are to open supermarkets there. Another blow for peace and prosperity!

POLITICIANS always ask us to "talk about the issues" — rather than the personalities — in political debate, but they seldom really talk about the issues themselves. For example, John Redwood has voted for the restoration of the death penalty (as well as voting against abortion and against reducing the homosexual age of consent to 18), yet I have not heard a single politician discuss any of these issues. I think when politicians say "issues", they mean, not ideas, but "tactics". Not a single politician that I know of has been heard to discuss Mr Redwood's radical and innovative book "Popular Capitalism", though I suspect that is because they haven't read it (or have not bought it, since it costs £25).

Continued from previous page

conducted experiments on her reproductive organs; eggs were removed from her womb, she believes, and embryos implanted. Jerry recalls that when she was 27 the aliens took her aboard a spaceship and showed her two little girls, "very angelic, with pale skin, wispy hair and huge blue eyes. They said to me: 'You are our mother.' After embracing them, I felt all the usual motherly instincts."

Born into a high-achieving, New York Jewish family, Mack has blazed a dazzling trail through Harvard, first as a student, graduating *cum laude*, then as a member of faculty, and co-founder of the university's school of psychiatry. He has lectured worldwide, and published several books, most notably a 1977 biography of Lawrence of Arabia, *A Prince of Disorder*, which won a Pulitzer Prize. Several critics hailed it as one of the finest psychological personality studies of the 20th century. But it did not sell nearly as well as his book about UFOs.

NOW Mack has become rich and famous beyond the dreams of the average, chalky-fingered university professor. And that, he believes, is the real reason why he is the first Harvard professor of modern times to be effectively put on trial.

Mack is not without his supporters. "The whole case against him is outrageous," said Alan Dershowitz, the high-profile Harvard law professor whose involvement in a number of celebrity trials — currently that of O. J. Simpson — has also attracted murmurings of disapproval from on high. "John has been doing this work, quietly and diligently, for years. And

rageous," admitted Mack. "I won't deny the whole thing has been painful."

It was a chance meeting with the New York artist Budd Hopkins, a leading figure in American UFO circles, that first triggered Mack's interest in abduction theory. Hopkins has spent years collecting and analysing accounts of extra-terrestrial activity. "Nothing in my 40 years as a psychiatrist prepared me for what Budd had to say," recalled Mack, who would later dedicate his book to him.

As Mack delved deeper into UFO sub-culture, the abduction stories he heard struck him as not merely interesting but beyond logical explanation. "Too many of the details were too consistent to have been invented," he said. "People with no opportunity to collude gave accounts of remarkable similarity."

From the interior configuration of the spaceships to the design of medical instruments used by the aliens, the experiencers' descriptions tallied to an uncanny degree. "I spent hundreds of hours with these people," said Mack, "before, finally, I said, 'Look, something is really going on here.'"

Whatever the ultimate worth of his conclusions, Mack has provided the world with a useful guide to alien abduction techniques. From his case studies, it appears that virtually all victims are taken from their beds or motor vehicles — although one woman tells of being snatched from a snowmobile. The aliens' approach is usually indicated by electrical activity — a TV set suddenly coming on, interference on a car radio. Victims often report seeing an intense blue or white light and hearing a rhythmic hum.



Shadowy influence: a victim of the 'body-snatchers'

## Professor Mack and the little green men

The case studies reveal a particular consistency in the physical descriptions of the aliens. The most commonly observed kind were what Mack calls the "small greys", who appear to be orderlies acting under guidance from larger and more intelligent aliens known in

them at about five foot — and appear to be older.

Equally impressive to Mack was the physical evidence — the curious patterns of pinpricks, "scoop-marks" and cuts often found on abduction victims. In one case, he says, the distinctive, geometric marks were found

Joe's first memory of an abduction dates from when he was about 14 or 15. Late in the evening, he had wandered outdoors, behind the family's barn at the rear of the house. He felt, later, that he had been "drawn there by a subtle force". As he looked up at the stars, he saw a spaceship shaped like "a standing-up egg" descend slowly to the ground.

As it landed, a small, thin figure, whose face Joe describes as "all lights", approached him, dressed in a tight-fitting black suit. He later came to know the creature as Tanoun and ceased to fear him. But on this first occasion, Tanoun led Joe inside the ship to a large room with a table upon which he was made to lie down. A needle was inserted into Joe's upper neck. He had the sense that something was being implanted inside his head. Tanoun told him: "We are close. We are with you. We are here to help you."

An alternative form of help is offered by a thoroughly sceptical, and distinctly earth-rooted, scientific establishment. Among mainstream psychiatrists, the overwhelming consensus is that the UFO phenomenon is the result of what Ronald Siegal, University of California researcher, calls "the normal hallucinatory powers of the human brain".

Mack's numerous detractors accuse him of peddling bad dreams as good science, of passing off old lore as new research and of failing to make a distinction between sanity and the absence of mental disorder. They accuse him of manipulating his subjects' "memories" to fit his predispositions, and of ducking some of the most elementary questions of the whole UFO debate.

Those who claim never to have encountered such images are merely resistant to the idea of having done so — rather in the way that people deny being influenced by advertising.

A 1993 Canadian study of 49 experiencers broadly confirmed Mack's view that such people are unlikely to be suffering from mental disorders to any clinically significant degree. What did set them apart was a strong predisposition "to believe in UFOs and the existence of alien life forms". In other words, the material was already in their heads.

The condition that makes alien abduction appear real is called "sleep paralysis", a comparatively rare phenomenon which may affect up to four per cent of people at some time in their lives. The senses are aware and functioning, but the controlling mechanism of the brain is still asleep. The effects can be terrifying and memorable. Sufferers have the sensation that their dreams are really happening. If ideas of UFOs and aliens are already deep in the psyche, sleep paralysis is almost guaranteed to bring them out.

"It's essentially a dream experience, made sufficiently realistic as to be logged in the brain as authentic memory," said Seigal. "It has been known about since antiquity. In German folklore the condition was represented by an old woman, known as the Mare, who sat on the sleeper's chest. It gives us the origin of the word 'nightmare'."

Will Harvard's bad dream end with the grounding of Mack's UFOs? Even without the contribution of the space aliens, this has been an *annus horribilis* for America's most illustrious univer-

## Creation is no more than 'a blind force'

THE television presenter and zoologist Johnny Morris is haunted by God's earthly image. The subject affords him much amusement and our discussion is conducted against the sound of his throbbing chuckle, like the dying putter of an outboard motor.

"It started with my father telling me that the clergy wore Wolsey underwear beneath their robes," he says.

"I try to think of God, then Father Christmas comes round the corner to haunt me," he continues, flapping his large hand in a waving gesture.

Morris hosted the successful children's programme *Animal Magic* and gave voice to Dotty the Lemur and Broly the Umbrella-cockatoo. He believes the force behind Nature is related to evolution more than to God.

"I love Nature's beauty and intricacy. There's a cicada that sleeps for 17 years. It wakes up..." Morris looks at his watch by way of illustration "...then says to itself: 'Another five years to go' — then goes back to sleep."

"Doesn't that make you think of a divine creator?"

"There's a blind force which is not in control of itself. It's pure chance. You should watch a coral island create itself in the Pacific."

However, he believes that humans need religion to pro-



ME AND MY GOD

Johnny Morris talks to Frances Welch

wear to knock down an archbishop.

"The Nativity plays were also a source of amusement. Something always went wrong. A call of Nature would stop everything in its tracks."

Morris lost his faith during the Second World War, when he farmed. "There's plenty of time to think while you're driving a tractor. I came to the conclusion there was no God. There was no God in the sense of a He with a capital H. I suppose it was also because the urgency and the horror of war put religion into the background."

Did he ever celebrate the Harvest Festival? "Oh, that was just a booze-up"

from on high. "John has been doing this work, quietly and diligently, for years. And the moment he gets any recognition for it, the university freaks out. The kangaroo court they have set up will damage Harvard's reputation more than anything John is ever likely to do."

Tall, bony, with an unnervingly intense gaze, Mack is the subject of considerable gossip and innuendo on the Harvard cocktail-party circuit. There have been whispered stories about the real reasons for his estrangement from his wife, Sally, and widely circulated accounts of his supposedly eccentric behaviour at social gatherings. "Some people support me, and some think I'm out-

tims often report seeing an intense blue or white light and hearing a rhythmic humming noise. By way of corroborative evidence, Mack says claims of abduction are frequently accompanied by independent reports of UFO activity in the same area.

Most of the victims recall being "floated" on some kind of light beam to the alien craft. Under hypnosis they relive the panic of seeing their homes or vehicles slowly vanishing beneath them. Some can recite, verbatim, entire conversations that took place with their captors. For reasons that remain unclear even to Mack, very few can remember the circumstances of their return to earth.

orderlies acting in accordance from larger and more intelligent aliens known in UFO parlance as the "doctors".

The small greys have large, pear-shaped heads, long arms with three or four long fingers, a thin torso and spindly legs. The creatures are hairless, with rudimentary nostril holes, no ears and a small slit of a mouth. By far their most prominent features are huge, black eyes that curve upwards, tapering dramatically towards the back of the head. Several of Mack's witnesses describe what appears to be an "eye inside an eye", with the dark, outer cover acting as a goggle. The "doctors" are taller — most accounts put

abduction victims. In one case, he says, the distinctive, geometric marks were found on a quadriplegic who could not have inflicted them himself. "It does seem bizarre," agrees Mack. "But this is not the product of mental illness. These people are speaking genuinely about something powerful that has happened to them. The feelings they experience — the terrors, sweats and body shakes — are real."

Who are these people? Should we be listening to them? Joe, a 34-year-old psychotherapist, contacted Mack in 1992 hoping to discuss what he called, in his letter, "a variety of ET experiences going back to early childhood". One of eight children, Joe had been raised in the backwoods of Maine, with a healthy respect for nature and the big outdoors.

For as long as Joe could remember he had dreamed of encounters with aliens. When he was a small boy he had a recurrent nightmare that a witch, like the one in *The Wizard of Oz*, would fly up to his bedroom window, force him to look into her "huge eyes" and make him climb aboard the broom. "Once I looked at her eyes, I was all hers and she would whisk me away," he recalls.

ducking some of the most elementary questions of the whole UFO debate.

ONE of Mack's most outspoken critics is the prominent University of California psychologist Richard Ofshe. "If there's a certain brilliance in backing the trendiest horses available, then Mack has it," said Ofshe. "He has made a stellar, absolutely spectacular, world-class series of mistakes."

If the aliens are really out there, why are their spaceships landing in suburban back gardens in Cleveland and not on the lawn of the White House? How come Herbert from Houston is selected for study and not the Duke of Edinburgh? What makes the aliens so shy of revealing their obviously superior capability? And if they are so capable, why have they been performing exactly the same experiments for decades?

According to most specialists, the consistency of the accounts that Mack found so striking can be simply explained by the popular cultural portrayal of aliens as leathery beings with big heads — à la ET — and exposure to the traditional comic-book images of flying

aliens, this has been an *annus horribilis* for America's most illustrious university. A fatal helicopter crash destroyed its historic boat sheds; the head of the Singapore police force was mugged on campus; and a female student hacked her room-mate to death with a 10-inch carving knife. "It's been very tough," said the university's chief spokesman, Joe Wrinn, "and I am very, very tired."

But this is not the time to sleep. Sleep is when they come for you.

## BIRTHDAYS

Among those celebrating their birthdays today are: **Kenneth Clarke MP**, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 55; **Jerry Hall**, model, 39; **Lord Home of the Hirsell**, former Prime Minister, 92; **Rene Lacoste**, former Wimbledon men's champion (twice), 90; **Lord Mackay of Clashfern**, Lord Chancellor, 68; **Lord Owen**, Bosnian peacemaker, 57; **Ann Taylor MP**, shadow Leader of the Commons, 48; **The Duke of Wellington**, 80.

However, he believes that humans need religion to provide them with a moral code. "Wolves are social animals that have strict codes based on the amount of food there is. If food's short, the females refuse to breed — there's no computer telling them what to do."

"Religion provides the set of rules by which humans can preserve themselves. The Ten Commandments are brilliant. The Church was beautifully conceived, and the decline of interest in religion is related to the anarchy of the days in which we live," he adds, accentuating the downward cast of his features.

We talk in the garden of his converted Wiltshire barn which, as he proudly points out, is bordered by God's Wonderful Railway (the Great Western). Morris runs large fingers through the fur of a luxuriating cat as he remembers the influence that religion had on his childhood.

"My mother was a believer, but my father has the same outlook as me. A Church of England procession had him in paroxysms. I'd say, 'Look at the gilt on those robes', but he would mention the Wolsey underwear — and there's nothing like smart under-

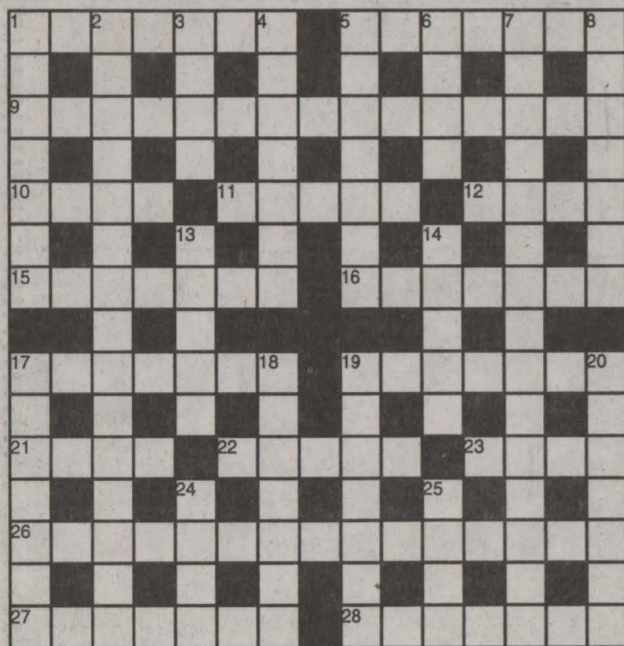
Harvest Festival? "Oh, that was just a booze-up!" He rejects the idea that animals' sixth sense constitutes evidence of another world. "Animals feel impending disaster. Cats go into the country before earthquakes. But they are simply picking up vibrations and tremors that we can't feel, in the same way that they can hear sounds that we can't hear."

His wife, Irene, who died five years ago, held the same agnostic views. To my surprise, Morris tells me she is now buried in his garden. "She didn't want to be cremated and she was never a devotee of the Church. I thought this was the best thing. I don't find it at all disconcerting to have her there. I often go and chat to her."

"Do you worry about her being buried in unconsecrated ground?"

"I don't know what that means. It's just a man with a bowl full of Thames water." Irene's grave lies under a statue where Morris also plans to be buried. "I don't want to have a normal service. There's such an atmosphere of gloom..." The chug of laughter is barely discernible. "Parsons ruin funerals."

## GENERAL KNOWLEDGE PRIZE CROSSWORD



### Crossword No.140

Book tokens to the value of £15 will be awarded to the senders of the first three correct solutions opened from all entries received. Solutions must reach THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH, PO Box 603, London E14 9FF, by first post on Friday. Envelopes must be sealed and marked "GK140" in the top left hand corner. The solution and winners' names will be published in two weeks' time.

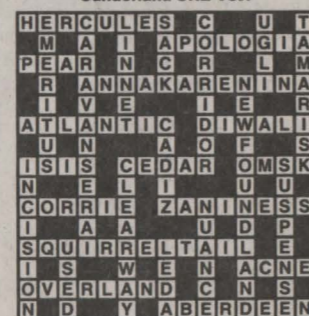
Name .....

Address .....

● Review Prize Crossword, Back Page, Review. Enigmatic Variations Prize Crossword, Back Page, main paper.

### Sol. No.138 + Winners

Mrs D Buswell, East Cosham, Hants; Miss J M Cochrane, Edinburgh EH4 2HJ; Mrs W Forster, Sunderland SR2 7SJ.



### ACROSS

- County, port and mountains in Eastern Ireland (7)
- Constellation in Northern Hemisphere close to Andromeda and Pisces (7)
- British composer best known for his trilogy 'Song of Hiawatha' (9-6)
- Member of the old royal family of Peru (4)
- Band of mown grass (5)
- Brummell, a man who set the fashion in men's clothes (4)
- Instrument for measuring electric current in amperes (7)
- Incidentally, by the way (7)
- Petty gangster (7)
- Wild or half wild horse found in SW USA (7)
- Narrow strip of wood (4)
- Organic compound, a derivative of ammonia (5)
- Port and resort in Southern Portugal (4)
- Miss Jones in 'Rising Damp' (7,2,2,4)
- Spanish cardinal, statesman and grand inquisitor (7)
- Omar —, astronomer and poet noted for the 'Rubaiyat' (7)

### DOWN

- City in Southern Kansas in Glen Campbell's 1969 hit '— Lineman' (7)
- Novel by Stella Gibbons (4,7,4)
- Brightly-coloured Australian or Indonesian parrot (4)
- Man whose wife has passed away (7)
- Quills for plucking musical instruments (7)
- Thomas —, author of 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard' (4)
- Understandable without any clarification (4-11)
- Johann —, Austrian composer (7)
- Gramophone needles (5)
- France's chief naval station is based in this port (5)
- Capital of Nova Scotia (7)
- Imitation of nature or human behaviour (7)
- Halfway between today and next Saturday (7)
- Coarse cloth often stiffened with gum that used to be used for clothing (7)
- Painted or mosaic image of Christ (4)
- Jakarta is its capital (4)

IT IS true after all. Just as the Victorian doctors claimed, sexual excess — what Hypocrites called 'immoderate venery' — really does cause blindness.

Dr Thomas Friberg of the University of Pittsburg has reported six cases of "sudden visual loss associated with sexual activity". Thus, "a 39-year-old man describes sudden blurring of vision in his left eye while he was gazing out of the window".

After more detailed questioning, he related that a dark spot had appeared centrally in his field of vision while his partner was performing "a variant of heterosexual intercourse on him". Clinical examination showed evidence of haemorrhage from a burst blood vessel in the retina at the back of the eye.

The precipitating cause in this and the other five cases, Dr Friberg believes, was the marked increase in blood pressure that accompanies sexual activity. "The risks of blindness with sexual stimulation would be minimised by refraining from undue physical exertion," he writes, adding: "Age must play a role, as five of the patients were over 40." Luckily, the haemorrhages cleared spontaneously and most recovered normal vision within a few weeks.

Another equally dramatic and worrying complication of "immoderate venery" has been highlighted by a personal account of a young doc-

tor in the medical journal *Monitor Weekly*. While in bed with his partner, he writes: "All had gone uneventfully, until at the point of orgasm I suddenly experienced a pain in the back of my skull akin to being struck on the back of the head with a sledgehammer. My poor girlfriend looked on in horror as with a cry of pain I sat up and then promptly fell to the floor."

He was subsequently admitted to hospital where a neurology professor told him he was suffering from "tension headache". The professor was wrong; such headaches are more typical of a subarachnoid haemorrhage, where a surge of blood pressure bursts an aneurism in a blood vessel at the base of the brain.

It was much more likely, however, that the good doctor's headache was a variant of migraine, known as "benign coital headache". Although the headache may feel anything but benign, recovery is rapid and there is no damage to the brain. It is also, as Dr J. W. Lance, neurologist at the University of South Wales, points out, highly capricious. "The

# Blind spot when it comes to sex



Too much of it really can cause loss of sight — temporarily, reports Dr James Le Fanu

headache might develop on several occasions in succession, and not trouble the patient for several months, or even years, even though there has been no alteration in sexual technique."

Such curiosities aside, the substantive and difficult to resolve question is whether the significant haemodynamic changes that accompany intercourse — the rise in blood pressure and heart rate — present a significant threat to those who already have had, or might be at risk of, a heart attack or stroke. The usual answer is that if a person can manage two flights of stairs,

there is nothing to worry about.

A more precise evaluation of the risk can be gained from the results of exercise-testing in patients who have, or are suspected to have, heart disease. According to Dr Barry Franklin, a cardiac rehabilitation expert from Michigan: "With maximal exercise-testing in which people are achieving their peak capacity for 10 to 15 minutes, the risk is one death in 10,000 tests. As sexual activity for most represents only a third of their physical capacity for a short period of time, people have little to fear."

He concludes: "If someone can walk a mile in 17 minutes comfortably and without adverse signs or symptoms, he or she can safely engage in sex..."

Even those who do get symptoms of either angina or palpitations during intercourse should not be discouraged. Dr Graham Jackson, cardiologist at Guy's Hospital, advises that such patients should only avoid sex after a meal or a hot bath, as this puts an extra strain on the heart. The symptoms of angina can be prevented by

taking a GTN tablet under the tongue, which dilates the arteries to the heart, and fortuitously also increases the firmness of an erection. Palpitations can be controlled with beta-blocker drugs.

He reports a study of 35 patients with angina, 29 of whom had intercourse at least once a week, 19 of these developing angina on most occasions. With this combination of drugs, they were able to have intercourse without angina, and four of the six who had abstained resumed sexual activity.

"Sexual activity is safe for patients with heart disease, who enjoy intercourse with their spouses at home," he said. The same may not, however, be true for middle-aged men "engaging in extra-marital relationships".

A FEW weeks ago I mentioned the drug Tretinoin, or Retin A, a derivative of vitamin A said to improve the appearance of skin "photo-damaged" by over-exposure to the sun. This, I now gather, is available on private prescription only as Retinova.

The manufacturers have sent me several academic papers — complete with "before and after" photographs — which have assessed its effectiveness. In one large study of 300 patients who used the cream once a day for six months, over half reported improvements in fine wrinkling and mottling of the skin.