

# Show sends Harvard's UFO prof into orbit

By MARK MUELLER

The strange and sordid world of alien abduction may inspire an earthly legal battle after a TV show airs tonight purportedly debunking the work of a Harvard professor immersed in the culture of the extraterrestrial.

Harvard Medical School psychiatrist John Mack, a longtime believer and investigator of alien abduction claims, calls the 8 p.m. "Nova" broadcast on WGBH an "unconscionable" and "terribly biased" attempt to examine stories of hijacked humans in general and his work in particular.

"The effect of this program is to try to discourage anybody

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# Harvard prof may sue show portraying him as spaceshot

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from taking the reality of this phenomenon seriously," Mack said yesterday. "They try to dismiss it as hallucinations or distorted thinking or people being led by hypnotists, and in my view, having worked in this field, that is patently false.

"Alien abduction is not something that yields its secrets to conventional explanations."

Particularly galling to Mack — and what might trigger a defamation suit, according to his lawyer, Eric MacLeish — is Nova's use of Donna Bassett, a

freelance writer who trashes Mack's work in front of the camera.

Bassett, dismissed by Mack and his lawyer as a "wacko" who latches on to a new cause every few years, says she went undercover into Mack's alien abduction subculture and paints the doctor's methods as fraudulent.

Mack has demanded that Nova cut out a four-minute interview with Bassett, a demand that a Nova producer yesterday said had been denied.

Bassett, from her home in North Carolina, last night de-

fended herself against Mack's attacks but said she wouldn't let them get under her skin.

"Being called a wacko by the Mackies is like being called a liberal by Pat Buchanan," she said.

Denise DiIanni, the producer of the hour-long Nova film, also mounted a vigorous defense of tonight's show, calling it a "thoughtful and considerate treatment of a complicated subject."

"We felt it was our job, however unpopular, to report whatever science said about the alien abduction phenomenon," she said.

And science, at least in the person of acclaimed astronomer and biologist Carl Sagan, dismisses alien abduction and the occasional abduction-and-rape scenario as hallucination or other scientifically explainable phenomena.

In a seven-page letter to the Boston-based television show, Mack railed against such thinking, likening alien abductees and investigators to the early pioneers of science.

"We are facing a problem like that faced by the people of the fifteenth century," he wrote. "In that day, many people could not believe the world was round because common knowledge dictated that people would fall off any round object."