

UFOs abduct Hub's attention

Battle of UFO titans sets down in Boston

By STEPHANIE SCHOROW

Call this a close encounter of the academic kind: Two of the biggest names in alien abduction squaring off over the most divisive issue in UFO research.

No, not whether alien abductions are real. That was a given for most of the crowd packing the John Hancock Hall Friday

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night in what moderator Christopher Lydon called "our own Berkeley Street 'X-Files.'"

The *real* issue dividing John Mack, a Harvard psychiatrist, from Budd Hopkins, author of three books on the phenomenon, was this:

What the heck do these aliens think they're doing?

Prodding, poking, probing abductees. Terrifying them. Giving them moments of great joy — then messing with their memories. Hopkins' voice shook with fury when he described how some aliens tell their captors that they are their real parents.

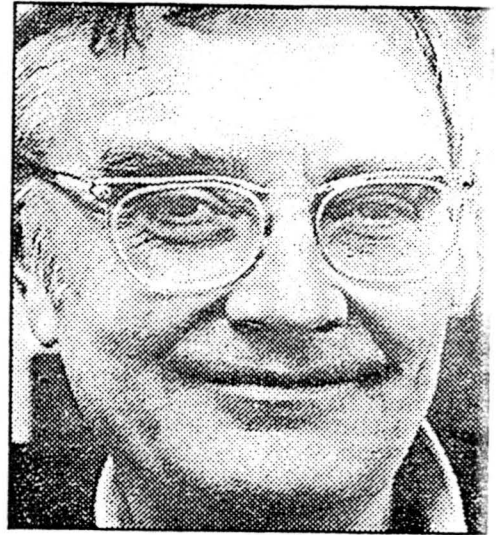
"The aliens are extremely deceptive and operate in a covert manner," Hopkins said, as the sound system crackled and wailed. "We can't trust what the aliens are saying."

Mack, however, said he has seen abductees who were transformed by the experience, who formed a spiritual bond with the beings and who believed they were trying to help make us earthlings better.

"We're on the edge of something that is rich, vast, and we don't even admit exists in this country," Mack said.

If they're here to heal us, "I don't like their bedside manner," Hopkins remarked.

The dialogue between Mack and Hopkins was sponsored by the Cambridge-based Program for Extraordinary Experience



BUDD HOPKINS
Leary of alien motives

Research, which was founded by Mack.

Mack, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer, raised eyebrows even within Harvard's arched walls over his bestseller, "Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens," which suggests alien abductees might just be telling the truth. Hopkins, an artist, has been interviewing abductees for 20 years, although he's drawn fire for his use of hypnosis and suggestion.

Their discussion attracted several hundred true believers, nonbelievers and wannabe-believers, such as the trio of 20-something girlfriends. One had seen a UFO as a child with her sister: "My sister's always talking about it, I'm always playing it down," she said. Her friend had read just about every book on the subject. The third was along for the ride.

While Mack and Hopkins are not exactly at opposite ends of the abductee debate, their difference in style was apparent even as they sat on the stage — the white-haired Hopkins was beaming, affable and relaxed; Mack was intense, acerbic and a compulsive note-taker.

Host Lydon, the National Public Radio icon, needled more than challenged: "How are these different from Elvis sightings?" was about the most difficult question he posed.

Well, Elvis sightings have a purpose: to prove the King's alive. Mack and Hopkins both say they aren't sure just what the aliens are doing on the third rock from the sun.

For example, abductees or "experiencers" report that aliens often show them terrifying images of the Earth devastated by pollution and other human disasters. Mack said these images, which could be of the aliens' own ravaged home world, may be to encourage us to take better



JOHN MACK
Aliens want to help

care of our fragile world. Aliens "are making a desperate effort to communicate something about us to ourselves," he said.

"John is idealist," Hopkins said. Abductees are often heavy smokers and if the visions are ecological warnings, "they've failed miserably."

Mack insists experiencers he's treated have been inspired to become environmentally active; Hopkins retorted that was probably due to Mack's therapy.

Hopkins suggests that aliens show such images to gauge human reactions. "They are extremely curious about human emotions and interior life which they don't seem to have themselves," Hopkins said. (Paging Mr. Spock.)

The question-and-answer session was anything but, dominated by personal testimonies on abductions and rambling statements. One man, in the style of an old-time preacher, announced the Bible urged us to fight against aliens. "Are you ready for that?" he thundered.

Hopkins said, gently, "I think John and I are ready to do the best we can."

A young man asked eagerly if the pair knew of people who actually wanted to get abducted by aliens. "Yes," Hopkins said cheerfully, "but I've never been able to arrange it."

Asked if aliens, being technologically superior, were among us, Mack, a bit impatiently said it would be impossible to tell; he hadn't seen any little bald-headed men with big eyes running around Boston lately (he didn't mention Cambridge), although, he conceded, there have been reports of aliens disguising themselves in hat and coats.

Afterward, several audience members griped that the dialogue was a bit heavy on the academic jargon. "You had to take UFO 101 to understand what they were saying," said the woman who said she had seen a UFO.

"I can tell you all about that stuff," piped up her friend.

"Tonight, we're going to get a beer," her companion said. □