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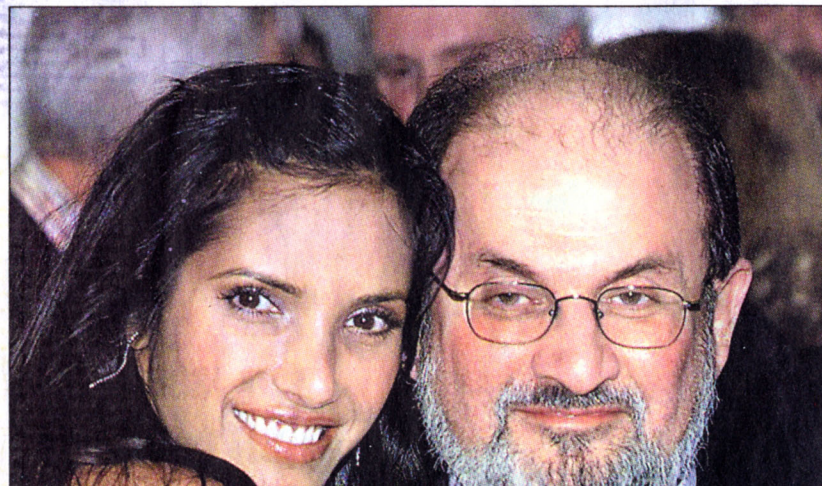
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# Southern California LIVING



## Down-to-Earth Academic Research

Camille James is among hundreds of people who say they have been abducted by aliens. Harvard psychiatry professor John E. Mack theorizes that some powerful intelligence is trying to intervene in human affairs. E2



## When a Writer Becomes the Story

Novelist Salman Rushdie left his wife and toddler son for a model two decades younger. Coincidentally—or not—so does the main character of his new book.

By MIMI AVINS  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Salman Rushdie is a 54-year-old Bombay, India-born novelist who left his wife and toddler son in London and moved to New York, where he fell in love with a ravishing Indian model 24 years his

younger. He dines with Al Pacino, pens lyrics for the rock band U2, and has a reputation as a rambunctious party animal. In his new novel, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rushdie is a serious writer who lives on the edge of celebrity's sword and could have, literally, died by it. Many people who have never read a word of his manic, Joycean prose know his name and at least some of his story.

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Although he doesn't believe that public

# Venturing From Shadows Into Light

They claim to have been abducted by aliens. A Harvard research psychiatrist backs them. Now 'experiencers' want society's respect.

By MICHAEL P. LUCAS  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Camille James sometimes wishes she were the average, everyday Beverly Hills expectant mom she appears to be. At 35, she's youthful and attractive with a girlish mop of chestnut hair and a sweet, fragile smile. She breezes through life as a caterer-schoolteacher-painter-magazine-writer-sometime actress and—as she says she discovered in hypnotherapy five years ago—a space alien abductee.

Under hypnosis during treatment for anxiety, she said, she recovered memories of a night in December 1995 when she was "taken out of my room through the ceiling in a blue beam of light" and brought aboard a UFO, where she saw "beings that were tall; they had white robes, big black eyes." She also recovered memories of aliens removing a fetus she was carrying—a hybrid alien-human fetus.

Life has never been the same for James, who learned to cope with her situation, met others like her and now is at the forefront of a movement to bring abductees—or experiencers, as they prefer to be called—into the mainstream of society.

Although they're treated by popular culture like castoffs from "The X-Files" and regarded by medical experts as sleep-disorder victims, experiencers are drawing on the work of a controversial but respected psychiatrist to claim a new identity that would enable them to live openly and free of discrimination.

"All we want is to be treated like normal, intelligent adults," agreed Jill (who asked that her last name be withheld), an experiencer who said she was fired from a job as a script supervisor after confiding in co-workers.

If all this sounds too wild, then it's time to consult a psychiatrist—and that would be Dr. John E. Mack, a 71-year-old professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, a researcher, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and the guiding light of UFO believers, more than 1,000 of whom turned out last month to hear him at the Mutual UFO Network, an annual symposium in Irvine.

Mack, who has evaluated hundreds of experiencers, says this group of people should be treated with respect; he considers them akin to shamans or religious mystics. Except that the alien-abduc-

tion phenomenon, he explained in an interview, is "like an outreach program from the cosmos." Experiencers can take comfort in Mack's work—and also in data showing that they're not alone. A January 2000 nationwide poll by Yankelovich Partners revealed that 1% of American adults believe they've encountered beings from other planets. And a Gallup Poll in May showed that 33% of Americans believe that extraterrestrial beings have visited Earth—and another 27% aren't sure they haven't.

Even so, 40 years after the first reported alien abduction, of New Hampshire couple Barney and Betty Hill, experiencers still move furtively on the edges of society, wary of ostracism. And Mack, who's been on the Harvard Medical School faculty since 1956, mostly teaching psychoanalysis to residents, said he, too, was long a skeptic. Twelve years ago when an associate introduced him to UFO researcher and author Budd Hopkins, Mack, as he wrote in a 1992 research paper: "... assumed that both [Hopkins] and his subjects must be mentally disturbed."

But Mack said he took a closer

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Dr. John E. Mack  
Harvard research psychiatrist

look in 1990, and several puzzling phenomena intrigued him: Young children and abductees in far-flung locations gave similar accounts; many abductees showed consistent injuries such as distinctive cuts and marks on the skin. And often abduction reports accompanied independent sightings of strange lights or flying objects.

Mack plunged into study, founding a Harvard-affiliated academic center, PEER—Program for Extraordinary Experience Research—through which he evaluated hundreds of abductees, and published his findings in two books.

In "Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens" (Scribner's, 1994) he documents his science—exam-

ining experiencers by taking psychological histories, performing batteries of standard clinical tests and conducting extensive interviews. In the follow-up "Passport to the Cosmos" (Crown, 1999), he examines abductions reported in traditional societies around the world.

His conclusion: Experiencers are authentic—not mentally ill. His theory: Some powerful intelligence is trying to intervene in human affairs. All of which, not surprisingly, has drawn rebukes within the academic community.

After all, this is the same John E. Mack whose book "A Prince of Our Disorder," a biography of British-born Arab warrior T.E. Lawrence, won the 1977 Pulitzer Prize for biography. And the same Mack who testified before Congress in 1983 about the psychological impact on American youth of the threat of nuclear war. And the same Mack who served as president of the respected International Society for Political Psychology.

And so his work draws respectful disagreement from some academics, outright derision from others.

"He enjoys... being the center of attention," sighs Arnold S. Relman, professor emeritus at Harvard Medical School, who seven years ago led a formal academic probe of Mack's work on behalf of the medical school dean. The investigation, Relman said, concluded that Mack should widen his professional circle of research associates and adopt a more detached attitude toward his subjects.

"He's not taken seriously by his colleagues anymore," Relman said. "But in the interests of academic freedom, Harvard can afford to have a couple of oddballs." Mack replied through an aide that he wouldn't resort to name-calling, but he and Relman simply disagree over the meaning of subjective reality when applied to experiencers.

"You have the sense that these people have actually experienced something of great meaning and depth and profundity that is not simply a projection of their own unconscious," Mack said.

Yet Mack won't be pinned down on the literal truth of any abduction experience, even though PEER's ongoing Multiple Witness Project seeks to corroborate patients' abduction episodes with spouses and others who were present at the time. Mack said he considers critics' demands for more physical evidence a distraction from his main inquiry into why human beings are being contacted and by whom.

Mack asks: "How come some seemingly normal housewife, who has not been particularly on a personal spiritual quest and isn't necessarily interested in UFOs, is suddenly having these tremendously powerful experiences that include being taken somewhere and probed...?"

The answer could lie in the heart of the scientific controversy surrounding the phenomenon—that is, experiencers' hypnotically recovered memories. Experiencers are often referred to Mack by other professionals, such as Barbara Lamb, a Claremont marriage and family therapist who hypnotizes patients and regresses them—that is, induces them to re-



KEN HIVELEY / Los Angeles Times

Camille James says a fetus was taken from her body during an alien abduction.

experience their past to discover the source of various disturbances.

Lamb, who has been in practice for more than 25 years, said she was at first "shocked and skeptical," to hear her patients relate memories of past lives or of abduction aboard UFOs. She concluded that space aliens exist, and "are fascinated with human beings."

But that's "nonsense," said Herbert Spiegel, a nationally recognized expert in hypnotherapy and member of the medical school faculty at Columbia University. "Hypnosis is for people with minor illnesses... phobias or bad habits like smoking or overeating." Hypnotic regression to recover memories of past lives or trips to other planets, he said, is what's known as a "rich fantasy life."

Richard J. McNally, a research psychologist in the Harvard University Department of Psychology, is conducting a separate study comparing those who believe they've been abducted by aliens with Vietnam War veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. McNally said his research suggests that experiencers have undergone a not-uncommon disorder he describes as sleep paralysis accompanied by "hypnopompic visions." A sufferer of this condition, reported by about 15% of the population, typically dreams with his eyes open, of such things as floating in space or of shadowy beings.

"Most people wake up and say, 'That was weird' and go back to sleep," McNally said. But experiencers he has studied share strikingly nonmainstream attitudes embracing New Age beliefs in such things as mysticism and UFOs. Mack brushes off such skeptics, saying his job is to persuade society that experiencers deserve respect. He gives them the appellation "authentic witnesses" and says they carry a message that Earthlings would ignore only at our peril. That message, he said, "has

to do with the perilous destruction of the Earth as a living system [and] this destructiveness that we are engaged in is drawing a response from the entities or beings in the cosmos."

Still, experiencers say abduction is an intense personal drama. For Camille James, the traumatic memories were recovered in the course of four regression sessions with different therapists. "Each time, it takes me about a year to recover," James said, perched in the dining room of her airy apartment. And there are some issues she is not emotionally prepared to confront—and doesn't plan to revisit during regression—including the encounter in which she became pregnant.

"I know a lot of abductees come back with a big ecological message, but I can't say that's my message," she said. Rather, she said her life was changed in two ways: in a new appreciation for children—hence her decision to become a school teacher and to have a baby—and a revulsion toward violence, especially in movies or on TV. Eventually breaking free of the abductions was its own life-changing experience, she said, involving an intense struggle aided by spiritual advisors.

Still, James hopes for the day when her experience will be considered normal—normal enough so she no longer needs to shield her identity in a newspaper photo, wary of the taunts of her students.

"Even my mother, the first time I got through telling her about everything I'd been through, she couldn't accept it," James said. "She listened and didn't say anything for awhile. Finally she said, 'Why couldn't you just be gay?'"

## City of Angles

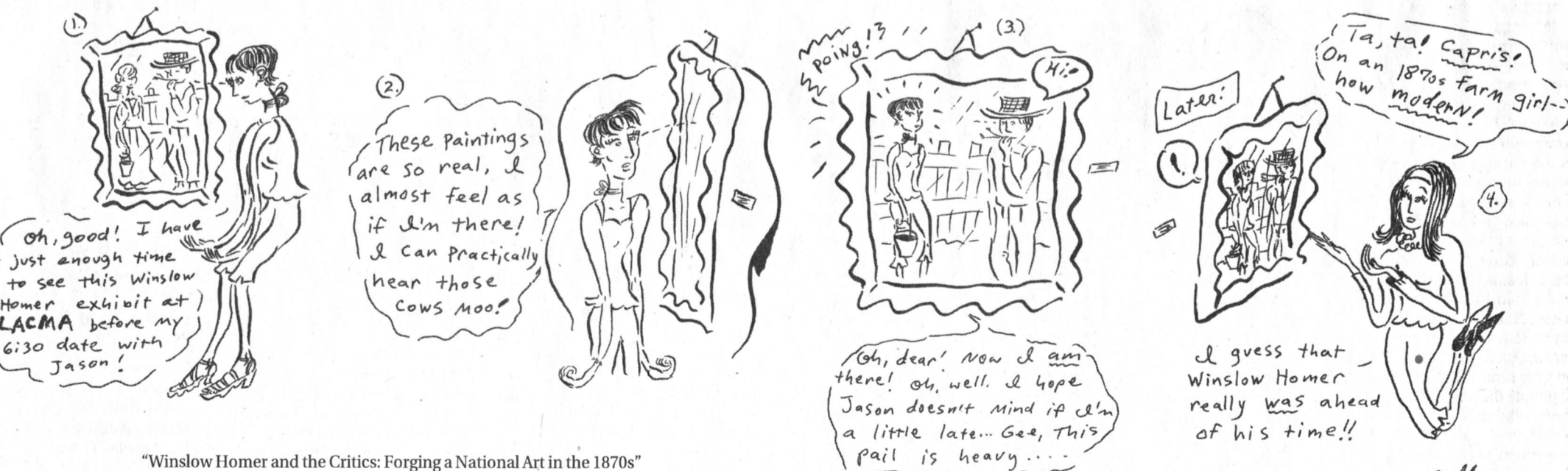
... will return Wednesday.



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Harvard professor John E. Mack is convinced aliens are visiting this planet.

## The Fringe Element: Starring Frieda Fringe in: "A Picture's Worth a..." by Michele Seipp ©2001



"Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s" is on exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art through Sunday.