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People are continuing to insist that they have had close encounters of the fourth kind.

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The abduction phenomenon is not going away.

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Instead, as Carla Wall tells us in this report, it's getting some attention in the academic mainstream.

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If alien abduction is here to stay, they concede, we'd better figure out what exactly is going on.

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I was so terrified looking into these big black eyes.

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I ended up on a craft laying down on a table.

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surrounded by these beings and one of them is putting a needle in my neck.

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They're emerging from a personal nightmare coming forward to tell their stories of alien abduction.

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The sheer magnitude of the phenomenon is what inspired this author to write close encounters of the fourth kind,

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alien abduction, UFOs and the conference at MIT.

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He is CDB Bryant, a seasoned and respected journalist, contributor to New Yorker magazine and the author of Friendly Fire.

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I met with Brian at his home in Connecticut to find out what drew him to the academic conference on which his book is based.

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Why go to the MIT conference in the first place?

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Because it was such a crazy idea.

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And I thought that if MIT, that high church of technology, was holding a conference on this subject,

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and I learned it was being chaired by Dave Pritchard, who is a Breuder Prize-winning physicist at MIT,

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and John Mack, who had already won the Pulitzer, the Harvard Psychiatrist.

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These two men were chairing a conference on this subject, which was equivalent of little green men.

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It was news. MIT was lending this phenomenon of credibility, which it had never had before.

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The prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a bastion of critical thought,

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was an unlikely setting for a conference on the alien abduction phenomenon, which took place in June of 1992.

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Physicist and MIT professor Dr. David Pritchard organized the conference.

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The point is not that MIT endorses alien abduction as a scientific area of research,

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but that they endorse the principle of academic freedom and freedom of inquiry.

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Pritchard and his co-chair, Harvard psychiatrist Dr. John Mack,

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assembled the most respected names in abduction studies for five days of seminars and debate.

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Despite the scottily focus of the conference, many attendees faced scorn from their colleagues,

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including historian Dr. David Jacobs.

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This is a phenomenon that is steeped in ridicule. There is a price to pay.

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It's a price that I have paid willingly. It's a price that I think all academics have to pay ultimately

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if you're very outspoken about the subject.

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You have to be doubly, triply careful about what you say. It's certainly going to be misinterpreted.

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In fact, you don't have to say anything and people will say,

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well, David Pritchard thinks it's real, even though I never said that and I don't, and I don't have any evidence.

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That doesn't matter. The fact that you're doing it, you're going to get branded in this fashion.

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What did you go up there thinking?

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Well, I went up determined to have an open mind, which says I was skeptical, and I still am.

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But in the meantime, I had such admiration for Pritchard and Mack for the risks they were taking.

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And ultimately, I felt such affection for the abductees and their courage for having come forward.

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For the skeptical Brian, it was not the presence of so many respected academics,

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but the sincerity of the 20 abductees at the conference that ultimately convinced him to take the phenomenon seriously.

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I woke up terrified. Light comes in the window, bed starts shaking.

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I was screaming because I had alien eyes right in front of my face and I couldn't get away from them.

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They were so vulnerable. They were frightened. They were smart. They were attractive.

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They were everything that you would want in a human being and yet, God, these terrifying things were going on.

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And I wasn't going to be the one who laughed at them and made fun.

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I just wanted to try to get them to tell the story and understand it.

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Here's someone who came into this with open eyes and basically he says that these abductees are sincere.

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They're telling similar stories and we just don't know why.

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The fact that he sat down and wrote this book and went through the process of his own changing

attitudes towards the subject matter,

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I think it's extraordinarily important. It's kind of a model for the way I think an intellectual,

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if he does get daring enough to look into the matter, would tend to find himself moving.

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Despite his attempt to leave no academic stone unturned, Brian was unable to find the kind of physical proof

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that would finally end the debate over the abductee's extraordinary claims.

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One of the astronomers at the Harvard complained that he wouldn't believe in the UFO phenomenon until a tailpipe or a cigarette lighter dropped from one.

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But people neglect the fact that these abductees are hard evidence.

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So you think something's going on? Do you think abductions are going on?

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I'm going to have to be a journalist. I haven't been abducted. I've never seen anyone abducted.

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But boy, the people I've interviewed are utterly convincing.

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And the phrase is, utterly credible people telling utterly incredible stories.

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They believe that they've been abducted. There's no question in their minds.

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Very short and you can't really explain what it's like unless it's actually happening to you.

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This is something that affects you all your life.

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There's a part of me that would love to find the answer that it was something else.

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CDB Brian knows that far more researchers needed before anyone will get to the truth of the abduction experience.

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But Brian says he won't be the one to do it. One paranormal book is okay, he feels, but two will compromise his standing as a serious journalist.