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Background

"Dear Colleague," the letter dated February 28, 1992, began. "We are organizing a scientific conference to assess the similarities and differences in the findings of various investigators studying people who report experiences of abductions by aliens, and the related issues of this phenomenon.

"One of the features of this conference," the letter continued, "will be an abductee panel with abductees drawn widely from the community. If you have investigated an abductee who is articulate and thoughtful and has had particularly interesting and/or manifold experiences, please send us his/her name and address and a brief paragraph about why this person would be a desirable participant."

The five-day conference, the letter explained, was to be held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from June 13 through June 17; its co-chairmen were M.I.T. physicist David E. Pritchard and Harvard psychiatrist John E. Mack. The letter's return address was Pritchard's office in the physics department at M.I.T., the university at which the fifty-one-year-old Harvard Ph.D. professor has taught and pursued research in atomic and molecular physics since 1968. In 1991 Pritchard was presented the prestigious Broida Prize, awarded biannually for outstanding experimental advances in the fields of atomic, molecular, and optical physics.

John E. Mack, M.D., Pritchard's co-chairman, is a sixty-three-year-old *cum laude* graduate of the Harvard Medical School and former head of the Department of Psychiatry at the Cambridge Hospital, Harvard Medical School, where he has been a professor of psychiatry for the past twenty years. He is the founding director of the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age, has won acclaim for his studies on suicide, and has testified before Congress on the psychological impact of the nuclear weapons competition on children and adolescents. In addition to having authored or co-authored over 150 scientific papers that have appeared in learned psychiatric and academic journals, textbooks, and other publications, Dr. Mack wrote the 1977 Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Lawrence of Arabia, *A Prince of our Disorder: The Life of T. E. Lawrence*.

One might reasonably except that a "scientific conference" on such a subject as people who have reported their abductions by "little green men" ought to be dismissed out of hand. And it certainly would have been but for the credentials of those chairing it, the site of the conference—that "high church of technology," as the Whole Earth Catalog's Stewart Brand has called M.I.T.—and the disturbing credibility, generally speaking, of the hundreds of individuals who, uncontaminated by exposure to any previous unidentified flying object lore or to each other, have so hesitantly, reluctantly, timidly come forward with their utterly incredible accounts of having been abducted and examined in UFOs not by "little green men" but rather, for the most part, by spindly-limbed, 3 1/2-to-4 1/2-foot-tall telepathic gray creatures with outsized foreheads dominated by huge, compelling, tear-shaped black eyes. And it is in the similarities of these abductees' stories and the consistency of their details that the true mystery lies. For, as John Mack would ask at the Abduction Study Conference, "if what these abductees are saying is happening to them isn't happening, what is?"

Those invited to the conference were asked to read two publications prior to attending. The first was David M. Jacobs's

Secret Life: Firsthand Accounts of UFO Abductions, a detailed, quasi-scholarly examination of the abduction experience testimony of some sixty individuals whom Dr. Jacobs, an associate professor of history at Temple University, had interviewed over a four-year period. In the course of that study, Jacobs uncovered approximately three hundred abduction experiences.

The central focus of the alien-abduction program is, according to Jacobs, the collection of human eggs and sperm. He, like his mentor, the New York artist and abduction-phenomenon authority Budd Hopkins, supports the most sinister explanation for the aliens' presence among us: they are, as Hopkins wrote in his book *Intruders*, engaged in "an ongoing genetic study," and "the human species, itself, is the subject of a breeding experiment."

"One of the purposes for which UFOs travel to Earth is to abduct humans to help aliens produce other Beings," Jacobs wrote in *Secret Life*. "It is not a program of reproduction, but one of production. They are not here to help us. They have their own agenda, and we are not allowed to know its full parameters.... The focus of the abduction is the production of children."

Early in his book Jacobs reviewed what is probably the most famous abduction case, that of Barney and Betty Hill, whose story, as written by John Fuller, appeared first in *Look* magazine in 1966 and later that same year as the book *Interrupted Journey*.

The Hills were an interracial couple; he was a black member of the NAACP and the New Hampshire Civil Rights Commission; she was a white social worker. They were solid, respected, devout members of their community. According to the Hills' story, in 1961, while driving at night along a remote stretch of road en route from Montreal to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, they observed a bright, luminous object in the sky. The object initially appeared to be stalking them from a distance, but later drew closer until it was hovering overhead. The Hills heard two beeping sounds, then saw the disk no more. Upon their return home, they discovered their arrival was two hours later than it should have been. They could not account for the passage of missing time.

The Hills remembered having thought they had seen a UFO, but nothing more. During the next several months, however, they were so distressed by bizarre dreams of being taken aboard an alien spaceship that they sought psychological counseling. They were referred to UFO skeptic Dr. Benjamin Simon, a reputable psychiatrist adept in hypnosis.

Under hypnosis, the Hills separately and singly recalled having been abducted from their automobile by small, hairless, ashen-colored Beings with large heads and eyes, small noses and mouths. The Beings brought the Hills inside a stationary UFO, isolated them from each other in individual rooms, and performed medical examinations upon them. During her examination, a long needle was inserted into Betty Hill's stomach as part of, the Beings told her, a "pregnancy test."

A larger Being, whom Betty took to be the "leader," communicated with her telepathically. At one point the Beings seemed mystified that Betty Hill's upper teeth could not be removed as Barney Hill's could. Barney wore an upper denture.

There followed various other "medical procedures"--skin scraping and the like--and then the Hills were permitted to leave the spacecraft and watch it depart. After a second series of beeps, their memories of the experience were erased. Only a vague sense of unease remained.

Since the Hills' abduction hundreds of other abduction cases have been catalogued and studied, a figure which Dr. Jacobs and others in the field believe is only a *fraction* of the number of abductions actually carried out.

As Abduction Study Conference co-chairman John E. Mack wrote in his introduction to Dr. Jacobs's *Secret Life*, "The idea that men, women, and children can be taken against their wills from their homes, cars, and schoolyards by strange, humanoid beings, lifted onto a spacecraft, and subjected to intrusive and threatening procedures is so terrifying, and yet so shattering to our notions of what is possible in our universe, that the actuality of the phenomenon has been largely rejected out of hand or bizarrely distorted in most media accounts. This is altogether understandable, given the disturbing nature of UFO abductions and our prevailing notions of reality. The fact remains, however," Mack continued,

that for thirty years and possibly longer, thousands of individuals who appear to be sincere and of sound mind and who are seeking no personal benefit from their stories have been providing to those who will listen consistent reports of precisely such events. Population surveys suggest that hundreds of thousands, and possibly more than a million, persons in the United States alone may be abductees, or "experiencers," as they are sometimes called. The abduction phenomenon is, therefore, of great clinical importance if for no other reason than the fact that abductees are often deeply traumatized by their experiences. At the same time the subject is of obvious scientific interest, however much it may challenge our notions of reality and truth.

The relevant professional communities in mental health, medicine, biology, physics, electronics, and other disciplines are understandably skeptical of a phenomenon as strange as UFO abduction, which defies our accepted notions of reality. The effort to enable these communities to take abduction reports seriously will be best served through scrupulously conducted research by investigators who bring a scholarly and dispassionate yet appropriately caring attitude to their work. In this way patterns and meanings may be discovered that can lead to fuller and deeper knowledge and, eventually, to the development of convincing theoretical understanding.

"Dr. Jacobs's findings will, I believe," Mack went on to say, "impress those who are open at least to the possibility that something important is happening in the lives of these individuals and countless others that cannot readily be explained by the theories and categories currently available to modern science...."

Jacobs is not new to the UFO field; in 1975 Indiana University Press published his *UFO Controversy in America*, with a foreword written by J. Allen Hynek--like John E. Mack, a gentleman with sterling credentials. A former professor of astronomy at Ohio State University and later chairman of the Astronomy Department at Northwestern University, Hynek was brought in by the United States Air Force in 1943 to be scientific consultant for its Project Sign, later Project Grudge, and still later Project Blue Book, the Air Force's effort to gather evidence that UFOs either did or did not exist. For the next twenty years Hynek served as consultant to the Air Force on UFOs. During that period Hynek went from being an astronomer who, prior to his association with the Air Force, had (in his own words) "joined my scientific colleagues in many a hearty guffaw at the 'psychological post-war craze' for flying saucers that seemed to be sweeping the country and at the naivete and gullibility of our fellow human beings who were being taken in by such obvious 'nonsense' " to becoming a man who would demand that the scientific community undertake a "respectable scholarly study of the UFO phenomenon."

In an August 1966 letter to *Science* magazine, the official organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Hynek attempted to refute the most common misconceptions about UFO reports:

- 1. *Only UFO "buffs" report UFO sightings.* Almost the exact opposite, Hynek pointed out, is true. "The most articulate reports come from obviously intelligent people" who had not previously given UFOs much consideration and were shocked and surprised by their experience. UFO buffs and "believers" of the cultist variety, Hynek added, rarely make reports, and when they do, they are "easily categorized by their incoherence."
- 2. *UFOS are never reported by scientifically trained people.* "On the contrary," Hynek wrote, "some of the very best reports have come from scientifically trained people. Unfortunately, such reports are rarely published in the popular literature since these people usually wish to avoid publicity and request anonymity".
- 3. *No UFO has ever been picked up on radar or by meteor-and-satellite-tracking cameras.* Not so, Hynek reported. These instruments had, indeed, tracked "oddities" that defied identification, and because of this Hynek was "unable to dismiss the UFO phenomenon with a shrug."

Pointing out that twentieth-century scientists tended to forget that there would be a "21st-century science, and indeed, a 30th-century science, from which vantage points our knowledge of the universe may appear quite different," he concluded that "we suffer, perhaps, from temporal provincialism, a form of arrogance that has always irritated posterity.

In his 1972 landmark book, *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry* Hynek originated the term "Close Encounters," subsequently popularized by the Steven Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. He did so in order to distinguish between those reports in which a UFO is seen at a distance and those involving sightings at close range.

The more distant UFO reportings he divided into three categories: Nocturnal Lights, those UFOs seen at night; Daylight Discs, those seen in the daytime (Hynek was cautious to add that he refers to these UFOs as "discs" because "the prevalent shape reported is oval or disc-like, although it should be understood the term is rather loosely applied"); and Radar-Visual, those reportings made through observations on radar accompanied by visual sightings.

Close-range sightings Hynek also broke down into three types:

Close Encounters of the First Kind. This category is the simple Close Encounter in which the reported UFO is seen at close range but there is no interaction with the environment (other than trauma on the part of the observer).

Close Encounters of the Second Kind. These are similar to the First Kind except that physical effects on both animate and inanimate material are noted, Vegetation is often reported as having been pressed down, burned, or scorched. Tree branches are reported broken; animals are frightened, sometimes to the extent of physically injuring themselves in their fright. Inanimate objects, most often vehicles, are reported as becoming momentarily disabled, their engines killed, radios stopped, and headlights dimmed or extinguished. In such cases, the vehicles reportedly return to normal after the UFO has left the scene.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind. In these cases the presence of "occupants" in or about the UFO is reported. Here a sharp distinction must be made between cases involving reports of the presence of presumably intelligent beings in the "spacecraft" and the so-called contactee cases."

The "contactees" Hynek was referring to were individuals such as "Professor" George Adamski (*Flying Saucers Have Landed* 1953; *Inside the Space Ships*, 1956), "Doctor" Daniel Fry (*White Sands Incident*, 1954), Truman Bethurum (*Aboard a Flying Saucer*, 1954), Orfeo Angelucci (*Secret of the Saucers*, 1955), and Howard Menger (*From Outer Space to You*, 1959), each of whom had emerged in the 1950s to peddle accounts of not only having seen UFOs but also of having been in close contact with their occupants.

Adamski's 1952 photographs of "scout craft" from a Venusian "mother ship" bore an uncanny resemblance to chicken brooders readily available from mail-order catalogues. Prior to his notoriety, Adamski had been a handyman in a four-stool California cafe..

Fry had an undisclosed job at New Mexico's White Sands Proving Ground when an "ovate spheroid" allegedly landed near him and whisked him to New York City and back in thirty minutes. Fry's saucer's occupants told him they were the survivors of a great war between Atlantis and Lemuria, and that they had contacted him instead of someone more highly placed because it would upset the "ego balance" of the Earth's civilizations if they were to reveal themselves.

The captain of Bethurum's "space scow" was Aura Rhanes, "queen of women," whose "smooth skin was a beautiful olive and roses." Aura's planet, Clarion, Bethurum reported, was in our solar system, but because it was always on the opposite side of the sun from us, we have never seen it.

Angelucci, an aircraft mechanic, recounted seeing a saucer land in a Los Angeles field. While inspecting it, he was told by a "space brother" that Earth's "material advancement" was threatening life's evolution. Angelucci's subsequent meetings with the aliens took place in a Greyhound bus depot.

And Menger, a self-employed sign painter, wrote of having been given a tour of the Moon's cities and other wondrous sights by his alien hosts, who subsequently informed him he had been a Jupiterian in a previous life and had been placed on Earth to do good deeds for mankind.

Not surprisingly Hynek considered the contactees to be "pseudoreligious fanatics" with "a low credibility value" and dismissed their accounts. "It is unfortunate, to say the least," Hynek wrote, "that reports such as these have brought down upon the entire UFO problem the opprobrium and ridicule of scientists and public alike, keeping alive the popular notion of 'little green men' and the fictional atmosphere surrounding that aspect of the subject.

"The typical Close Encounter of the Third Kind," Hynek emphasized, "happens to the same sorts of persons who experience all other types of UFOs, representing the same cross section of the public. The experience comes upon these reporters just as unexpectedly and surprises them just as much as it does the reporters of the other types of Close Encounters. These reporters are in no way 'special.' They are not religious fanatics; they are more apt to be policemen, businessmen, schoolteachers, and other respectable citizens."

The Abduction Study Conference to be held at M.I.T. would be an examination of Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind, a category Hynek seemingly had not anticipated. Such a case might be defined as one in which

personal contact between an individual or individuals is initiated by the "occupants" of the spacecraft. Such contact may involve the transportation of the individual from his or her terrestrial surroundings into the spacecraft, where the individual is communicated with and/or subjected to an examination before being returned. Such a close encounter is usually of a one-to-two-hour duration.

The second pre-conference reading assignment was "*On Stolen Time: A Summary of a Comparative Study of the UFO Abduction Mystery*" by Thomas E. Bullard, Ph.D.

In this paper, privately published by the Fund for UFO Research in 1987, Dr. Bullard noted that of the nearly three hundred alien abduction cases whose locations were known, 132 Came from the United States and 50 from the remainder of the English-speaking world. In addition, there were 69 cases in Latin America, 28 in continental Europe, and 3 from the Soviet Union.

Who experiences abductions? "Just about anybody," Bullard reported. "Abductees come from all walks of life, all levels of education, and all lines of work, though people whose jobs keep them outside at night run a higher risk than average. Two-thirds of abductees in this sample are male and one third female. Out of 303 cases, 76% are single-witness cases while 49 cases include two other witnesses and 12 cases three. A remainder of 12 cases involves more than three...."

Bullard's most surprising discovery was that "abductions are a peril of youth. If you once pass 30 without ever being abducted," he wrote, "you have little to worry about. A periodicity shows up in the age distribution with peaks at age 7, again at 12-13, 16-17 and to, lending support to the possibility that the captors keep tabs on a subject over the years. The range of abductions is lifelong, from infancy to age 77, but the frequency plunges in a striking way after 30."

Although both the Jacobs book and the Bullard summary were considered seminal to the meeting at M.I.T., it became apparent as the conference proceeded that there was considerable disagreement as to both the import and the meaning of those abductions they describe as having taken place.