

The Believer: Alien Encounters, Hard Science, and the Passion of John Mack

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The Believer is the expansive story of John E. Mack, a preeminent Harvard Medical School professor and psychiatrist whose exploration of alien abduction phenomena nearly destroyed his career and reputation.

Born in 1929 to wealthy German Jewish academics, Mack grew up in New York. His mother died when he was young; her loss caused a lifetime of abandonment trauma and inspired his interest in psychiatry. He entered Harvard in 1951 and later joined the faculty, founding the department of psychiatry at Cambridge Hospital.

In 1976, Mack published *A Prince of Our Disorder*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia); in the eighties, he became an antinuclear activist. He also turned to psychedelics and breathwork to assuage his psychological pain. Both opened him up to a range of psychospirituality, priming his belief in anomalous experiences.

In 1991, Mack met Budd Hopkins, a pioneering UFO abduction investigator. Hopkins explained his use of hypnotic regression to unlock the suppressed memories of “experiencers” of alien encounters. Mack was hooked. Within a year, he was counseling his own experiencers. He collected encounter stories that varied from benign abductions to the “forcible harvesting of...eggs and sperm for human-alien hybrid reproduction.”

Hard scientific proof was elusive, Mack acknowledged. He focused on the transpersonal, on experiencers’ authenticity and emotional intensity; he found that experiencers exhibited no psychopathology. But colleagues still derided him for “conclusion-jumping,” and Carl Sagan chided him with a quip: “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” Soon, Harvard came for a reckoning.

Based on fifteen years of research, interviews, and exclusive access to Mack’s archival material, *The Believer* is the story of a brilliant man whose breadth of interests generated a lifetime of achievements. Believers will appreciate the book’s extensive cosmic phenomena, and nonbelievers will find a unique chronicle of an unquenchable human spirit.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (March / April 2021)

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