

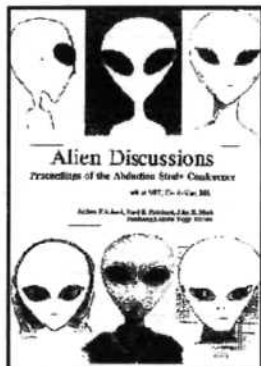
# Reports from the Alien Abduction Study Conference at M.I.T.

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**A**lien Discussions is the proceedings (papers and discussion) of the Abduction Study Conference at M.I.T. in 1992. *Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind* is a report by novelist C. D. B. Bryan of his impressions of the conference, which he attended as a reporter. The results are quite different when one views the

conference from the two perspectives. For example, Bryan tells us that two documents were required reading beforehand by participants in the conference: David Jacobs's *Secret Life* and folklorist Thomas Bullard's paper "On Stolen Time." The latter is a sort of statistical summary of characteristics of abductees and abduction scenarios.

The Jacobs book is definitely pro-abduction (although it tries to maintain a scholarly distance—unsuccessfully—from endorsing the phenomenon). The Bullard paper is probably an accurate statistical summary, although it implies the certainty of abductions in a subtle way. The *Proceedings* themselves never mention this required reading. They also are misleading about the entire makeup of the invitees. Although the writings of skeptics (in the CSICOP sense) are mentioned repeatedly in the *Proceedings*, the only attendee from CSICOP's ranks was Robert Sheaffer. No others were invited, as I understand it, to this "by invitation only" meeting.



The *Proceedings* volume is an expensively produced report of what is perhaps the most important conference ever held about the purported abduction of humans by aliens from UFOs. Many of the participants in the conference were Ph.D.s (20, mostly psychologists); and there were five physicians. Most of the attendees were either specialists in the UFO field (on the pro side) or claimed "abductees."

Because of the highly unusual nature of the claims of the abductees, there is strong need for good objective data on these incidents, something that has so far been largely lacking. The consistency of the stories told by the abductees is such that they appear to be having some sort of experience, but whether this experience is purely psychological is far from clear. Many of the papers in the *Proceedings* volume may help shed some light on this problem, although few could be called hard science contributions. Most are social sciences pilot studies. They indicate directions for future research studies.

The quality of the papers in the *Proceedings* volume varies tremendously (perhaps as might be expected). Some are quite good (e.g., Hufford and Bullard), some are just OK, while a

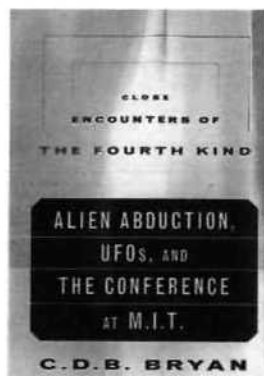
few are simply garbage. The reader can make his or her own specific judgments on these. None resolves the basic problem of whether abductions are real "kidnappings" or not. Many of the flaws in the data are pointedly underlined when (as Bryan describes) there is a strong protest by many of the scientists at the meeting that the infamous Roper survey given to people to see how many had the "abductee experience" was poorly and unscientifically designed. Since such pro-UFO writers as Budd Hopkins had a large role in the development of the survey questions, perhaps this again underscores the fact that nonscientists should not be attempting to do scientific research.

The *Proceedings* volume is marred by false starts, sloppy research, poor editing, and factual errors, but it has some real contributions. Many years down the road, it may well be looked at as one of the pioneering volumes that started the work that eventually led to the solution to this mystery.

The Bryan book provides a needed balance to the omissions of the other book. It gives lots of "outside the conference" talk, often between the participants and Bryan, providing a flavor that can't be otherwise obtained. On the other hand, Bryan has filled out his book with much information taken, as he acknowledges, from J. Allen Hynek,

*Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind: Alien Abduction, UFOs, and the Conference at M.I.T.* By C. D. B. Bryan. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995. 477 pp. Hardcover, \$25.00.

*Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference Held at MIT*, Cambridge, Mass. Edited by Andrea Pritchard, David E. Pritchard, John E. Mack, Pam Kasey, and Claudia Yapp. North Cambridge Press, P.O. Box 240, Cambridge, MA 02140. 1995. 683 pp. Hardcover, \$69.95.



Timothy Good, Keith Thompson, and John Mack's books. Some of this is pro-UFO material.

What seems to be the problem with Bryan, in general, is that he simply does not have enough background in

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the enormous UFO literature to be able to evaluate it objectively. It takes years to read enough and be in a position to have some grasp of the entire field. One simply cannot become an instant expert.

In addition, Bryan does not have the background to evaluate statements made to him by Linda Moulton Howe and many others. He simply reports

the statements, with no critical evaluation. There is a lot of talk about a required "paradigm shift," without much justification for such a drastic step. The same caveats apply to the many post-conference interviews that the Bryan book contains. His conclusion section seems to show a sort of naiveté about the literature that should raise cautions. □

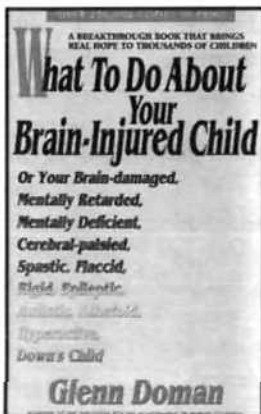
## Recycling Questionable Treatments

TERENCE M. HINES

◀ *What to Do About Your Brain-Injured Child, or Your Brain-Damaged, Mentally Retarded, Mentally Deficient, Cerebral-Palsied, Spastic, Flaccid, Rigid, Epileptic, Autistic, Athetoid, Hyperactive, Down's Child.* By Glenn Doman. Avery Publishing Group, Garden City Park, N.Y., 1994, xv + 294 pp. Paperback, \$11.95.

One of the most characteristic features of a questionable treatment is the claim that it will be effective for several different disorders, each with different pathophysiological causes. Given this, the title of the book by Glenn Doman reviewed here is a dead giveaway: *What to Do About Your Brain-Injured Child, or Your Brain-Damaged, Mentally Retarded, Mentally Deficient, Cerebral-Palsied, Spastic, Flaccid, Rigid, Epileptic, Autistic, Athetoid, Hyperactive, Down's Child.* Most of the conditions listed in the title have totally different causes. For example, Down's Syndrome is caused by chromosomal abnormality and is expressed in a characteristic pattern of changes in IQ. By the time the patient is in his or her late 30s, neuropathological and neurochemical changes in the brain similar to those of Alzheimer's disease occur. The neuropathology of autism, however, is totally different, consisting of cellular changes in the cerebellum as well as

certain other brain areas. To make matters worse, several of the disorders listed in the title are themselves mere labels for groups of different disorders with different causes. Thus, there are several causes for mental retardation and mental deficiency. Even epilepsy is a complex group of related disorders differing in cause, underlying neuropathology, and appropriate treatment. To suggest that all these disorders can be treated in the same manner is absurd.



One would expect that an author proposing a treatment for brain-damaged children would have a sound knowledge of neurology, neuroanatomy, and brain function. Alas, Doman seems to have only a nodding acquaintance with these areas. The book is chock full of the most egregious errors in these fields. For example, in the "Developmental Profile" in the center of the book, the brain area called the "pons" is said to be responsible for "outline perception." This is simply wrong. Outline perception is a

complex function carried out by portions of the visual cortex, a fact that has been known since at least the 1960s. Actually, the pons has no visual function whatsoever. On page 56 the pons is also credited with being "responsible for controlling trunk and limb motion to move the body in crawling motions with the belly on the floor. Therefore, the pons was responsible for crawling." Wrong. While motor fibers that are used to control body movements pass through the pons on their way from higher brain structures down to the spinal cord, the pons is in no way responsible for these movements. To argue that it is, is like arguing that a telephone cable is responsible for transforming spoken speech into electrical impulses simply because those impulses happen to travel through the cable.

Neurological howlers like these should make it clear that Doman has almost no real knowledge of the field in which he is attempting to be an expert. It is rather as if someone proposed a new way of repairing almost anything that could go wrong with an automobile, but confused the steering wheel with the carburetor.

Having said all this, it is important