

Visitors stranger than fiction

By John Boudreau
Staff writer

The diminutive figure peering into Whitley Strieber's darkened bedroom could have been a child.

But it had almond-shaped eyes and a black hairline mouth, which later formed into an "O."

Strieber says a strange sound emitting from his downstairs living room, a noise resembling a herd of people moving about quickly, had awakened him during the waning hours of Dec. 28, 1985.

They were what he calls the Visitors. And they had come for him. He explains his abduction that night in a new book, "Communion" (William Morrow, \$17.95).

Strieber, 41, is the author of such thrillers as "The Hunger" and "The Wolfen." But he maintains his latest venture, a story about nocturnal visits by strange, superhuman creatures, is absolutely true.

one of them heard the sound of little feet scurrying in their hosts' bedroom upstairs.

The encounters left Strieber an emotional wreck and on the verge of suicide. He thought he was going insane. It nearly crumbled his 18-year marriage.

He says the Visitors probed his

He eventually was released but he couldn't escape his jumbled, haunting memories.

Strieber turned to psychiatry, neurology and hypnosis for help, only to learn that what he had experienced was not caused by any known psychological or physical disorder.

"This isn't a horror story. This is simply scary."

— Whitley Strieber

life and body as though he were a petri dish specimen. At one point, Strieber says his fear was so great that "it seemed to make my personality completely evaporate."

During one of the abductions, a scaly measuring device was shoved up his rectum, an experience he likened to being raped. Among other painful pokings, a needle was inserted into his brain.

When he squirmed, a female Visitor, who he says smelled of cardboard, spoke to him in a Midwestern accent with an electronic overtone.

"What can we do to help you stop screaming?" she asked him.

Eventually, his anger and fear of the Visitors eased into an empathy for them. He says he now thinks of them in terms of "kinship."

Strieber says he decided to write "Communion" so those who have suffered similar experiences, and have been ridiculed for talking about them, will realize they are not alone.

But his usual publisher, Warner Books, politely declined to publish his manuscript. The company encouraged him to drop the idea and never to show the book to anyone else.

"They told me to hide it," he said. Undaunted, Strieber tried to peddle his book to 13 other publishers. Ten rejected him flat. But three companies liked "Communion" so much that a bidding war erupted. Morrow won and agreed to pay \$1 million for the hard and soft cover rights.

Strieber says he rejected a \$750,000 offer for the movie rights to "Communion." He wants to write the script himself. He also plans to write a follow-up book, which will detail how the family was affected by the encounters, and how it grew spiritually.

When "Communion" first hit the bookstores last month, some of Strieber's friends dropped him.

"I've lost a few friends over it," he says. "I've taken a lot of grief for this. But I've also been paid \$1 million."

"If you're really an ideologue, you're going to find this threatening," he says of his book. "This is an area where left-wing ideologues and fundamentalists see eye to eye."

The visits sparked his interest in UFOs. Before the Visitors, he never had more than a passing interest in them.

He has discovered that since 1983, there had been thousands of strange sightings in the skies over the area where his cabin is located. Some of those UFOs had been described as being the size of aircraft carriers. Strieber says.

And one evening in late December 1986, when Strieber says he was abducted, a neighbor told him he saw something hovering over the road less than five miles from Strieber's house.

Still, the writer is not convinced that he was visited by beings from outer space.

